The Crooked Apple Tree

Cornelia Meigs

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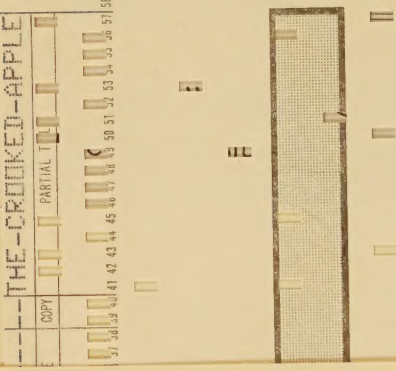

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THE CROOKED APPLE TREE

By Cornelia Meigs

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The Crooked Apple Tree

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"Who lived there?" Anthony asked. "Nobody seems to remember."

THE CROOKED APPLE TREE

BY CORNELIA MEIGS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
HELEN MASON GROSE

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

TO

MARIE

TO WHOM ALL THE CHILDREN SHE
HAS BROUGHT UP WILL FOR-
EVER OFFER AFFECTION
AND GRATITUDE

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THE CROOKED APPLE TREE

CHAPTER I

APPLE CREEK HILL

A COVEY of quail had settled down upon the ridge of high grazing land above Apple Creek. They were busy among the tall weeds and dry leaves, scurrying here and there, scratching in the dry grass and talking to each other in their small voices. Anthony Whipple, who had come hastily up the slope from the direction of the town, saw the quick, shy birds in time, and stopped suddenly in a brush-filled corner of the fence to watch them go about their business, unconscious and undisturbed. He had been playing football, and had thought that he was late in keeping his promise to meet his sister Jane here in Apple Creek pasture; so that he had come hastily and breathlessly up the twisting cow path. But he was early after all; the open hillside was empty, save for the flock of trim, speckled little birds hunting so earnestly for seeds, and for the scarlet hips that still clung to the leafless wild roses.

The boy sank carefully to his knees and sat back comfortably upon his heels, with his shoulder against a fence post, to watch the quail at his leisure. He was hot and pleasantly tired from his prowess at football practice, and quite ready for the long, peaceful hour he and his smaller sister Jane were accustomed to spend together in the quiet and sunshine of this place that they alone seemed to have discovered. He would not

have liked his comrades of the football field to know that it was a volume of poetry which bulged his pocket. He knew just what a sneer would appear on the face of Newton Thrale, the big boy of the school, should he catch a glimpse of the book of verse. Newton never talked of anything besides the newest make of automobiles, with a few remarks at times about girls and the superiority of the radio at his house. He cordially despised any one who wasted thought on other subjects; he would scarcely have words sufficient to express his scorn of a boy who would read poetry.

Until very lately Anthony himself frowned upon poetry like the rest of his world; but recently he had stumbled upon a certain book of stirring verse, a glorious narrative of kings and warriors with wide-winged helmets, of long-oared ships with high prows that roared through stormy seas. Little quivering sensations of excitement and delight ran through his scalp and down his back as he pursued the tale of Sigurd the Volsung, of Sigmund, the hero's mighty father, of the forging of the sword called the Wrath of Sigurd, of the winning of the cloud-colored war horse, Grayfell. He felt of the book in his pocket, but did not yet take it out. Anticipation was as pleasant as actual reading, so that he seemed in no hurry to open its pages. He was quite contented, instead, to study more closely than he had ever before been able to, the plump, eager quail, with their neat, speckled bodies, their short, round wings, and their soft gray breasts, barred with brown and black and chestnut.

Above him, a little log cabin stood on the open hillside just below the crest of the ridge, with a great apple tree growing before it. It seemed scarcely possible that, in the faint clatter which came up from the town in the hollow behind him, were combined the noises of trolley bells, locomotive whistles, and the honking of automobile horns. The small house, evidently built by some venturesome pioneer when this western country was still young, stood peaceful and undisturbed in the autumn sunshine, seeming a century removed from the busy modern life whirling past not half a mile away. A rabbit, hopping slowly and contentedly here and there through the grass, stopped to sun himself on the half-buried doorstone. It was plain that the place had stood so long untenanted that the birds and beasts had come to consider it as part of their own domain.

The cabin was not the mere box that some passing adventurer would build for temporary shelter; it had somehow, tiny as it was, the aspect of a more permanent home. The lines of the main roof swept down to broad eaves; the two wide chimneys at each end were of solid and dignified proportion. At each side were two small wings, joined to the central square of the house with just the right length and breadth of roof to give the whole building a distinct grace and character.

From the flat space before it whereon stood the apple tree, the ground fell away on three sides, sloping easily in the direction of the town, but dropping steeply

toward the other side of the ridge below which ran the little stream, Apple Creek. The incline was steepest of all directly in front of the cabin, where the hillside went down to the big Mississippi, broad and blue in the sunshine and running mile-wide between its wooded bluffs. From where Anthony sat, he could see across the shoulder of ridge to where Apple Creek came out of its ravine crowded with yellowing sycamore trees, and dropped into the great river. A long bar of bright sand, with a few willows upon it, stretched almost across the mouth of the smaller stream.

Glancing over his shoulder, Anthony could now watch his sister Jane coming through the narrow stretch of woodland that divided the pasture from the town, and trudging up the zigzag path which he had followed a few minutes before. She was not a very large girl for her ten years; but she was square and well-knit. Her longer and leaner brother was a good number of inches taller than she, more than a difference of three years usually brings about. His hair was fair, and his direct, eager eyes were blue; while her eyes were a clear brown, and her uncovered ruffled hair was chestnut in the sunlight, much the color of a quail's wing. Under one arm she carried a bulging package which he knew to be sandwiches; under the other she had a book which, so he could easily guess, was a green volume with battered edges, her most beloved collection of fairy tales.

It was not necessary for Anthony to hold up a hand in silent warning; she saw the flock of birds as quickly

as he had done and slipped without a sound through the fence, to sit beside him. The feeding quail, at first gathered about the cabin and the apple tree, had now spread all abroad over the hillside. One of them, larger and bolder than the others and evidently their leader, fluttered up to the low eaves of the cabin, and sat, clean-cut, against the blue October sky. They could watch his white throat swelling as he gave forth his clear call to gather his comrades, "Bob — white, bob — white."

They all came running together and commenced feeding again under the spreading tree. Why had the bigger cock quail called them back, Anthony wondered. The bird seemed to be uneasy and watchful, with an anxiety that presently spread to the whole of the flock. They ceased feeding and stood close together, their cheerful little voices quite silent now, all watching intently for something which the boy and girl could not see.

"There is some one

coming up the hill from Apple Creek," whispered Anthony presently, close to Jane's ear.

She answered softly, "Is that why they are afraid?"

Whoever it was had quick eyes and ears; for the footsteps tramping up the steep path halted, and then came lightly across the grass so that the birds should not be alarmed. Anthony and Jane watched the stranger who approached cautiously and then stood very still just as they had done. They saw him take off his hat, to wipe his forehead; for the climb was steep and the sun was hot in the cloudless sky. He had very yellow hair, which gleamed amongst the dull red and orange of the blackberry bushes about him. The two in the fence corner might have called him a young man; but grown-up people would have called him a

boy; a boy with a very sunburned face and dark blue eyes and with somewhat more height than he quite knew what to do with. The dust of many miles of tramping showed upon his brown knickerbockers and his pongee shirt. Slung across his back, he had a knapsack such as campers use, which his square shoulders seemed to carry easily.

"Who do you suppose he is?" Anthony whispered again to Jane. "Did you ever see him before?"

She shook her head. "Whoever he is, he looks awfully sorry about something," she observed under her breath.

It was true that the young stranger's face, even absorbed as it was in watching the quail, was overshadowed by the heavy cloud of some trouble whose nature they could not guess.

"He looks," Jane commented again, a moment later, "as though he could n't possibly smile, ever."

"It is n't his coming that frightened the quail," her brother whispered in reply. "They don't see him and they are still afraid."

The birds had, indeed, taken no notice of the newcomer's approach, but were still gathered in a huddle under the tree, looking upward through the branches. It was very still there on the hilltop, with only a few sounds coming up to them, — the muffled noises of the town hidden behind the patch of woodland to the south, the smooth trickling of water where Apple Creek, to the north of them and below the slope, dropped over a flat ledge on its way to the river, and the big, deep

undertone of the voice of the river itself. The most distinct sound of all was the cawing of three black crows who had risen from the woods and were flapping heavily away into the blue sky. In the still air, their harsh notes came back even after their dark bodies had dwindled to distant specks.

Jane was regarding the tall boy among the bushes with steady intensity. For some reason she was clutching the book under her arm more closely than ever, and was staring at him so fixedly that finally he seemed to feel her direct gaze. His eyes turned in their direction and observed the two in the fence corner. He moved a little and seemed about to speak, then looked at the quail as though unwilling to disturb them.

One young cock bird, weary of seeking shelter under the tree, had separated himself from the rest and came, pecking and investigating, out into the sunshine. Like a flash the waiting danger was upon him. A hawk,

dropping apparently from nowhere, swooped down with a swift skimming of red-brown wings and clutched

the unwary little quail. This was what the older, wiser ones had feared. The small bird screamed with terror; but it had seen the danger too la[illegible]

Jane cried out; Anthony shouted and [illegible]ed for a stone; but the newcomer was quicker th[illegible]ther. He swung his hat, with direct aim, and pitched it at the hawk. No heavy blow was needed to frighten the marauder away; it dropped its prey and dipped sideways, skimming off and passing so close to Anthony and Jane that they could see every detail of its fierce, round eyes, its curved beak and its sharp yellow talons. The whole covey of quail rose with that booming of wings which startles the steadiest onlooker, slipped over the edge of the hill, and disappeared into the underbrush.

Just too late for this brief drama, there came galloping up the hill a wildly anxious Irish setter puppy. His long ears were flapping, his tongue was hanging out, and his nose was snuffing at the trail which Anthony and Jane had followed. He had been occupied with some important puppy business when Jane had set out, and was coming now in panting haste to overtake his beloved comrades. He threw himself upon Anthony with pawing feet and caresses of an eager, moist tongue.

"Down, Brian. Stop it," ordered Anthony, whereupon Brian transferred his attentions to Jane, with even more inconvenient fervor, for he rolled her over among the blackberry bushes, knocking the book in one direction and the package in the other.

"Oh, stop him," she cried, gasping with laughter. "He did n't hurt me; but he' ll get the lunch!"

Anthony gathered up the book, which had pitched, face downward, among the goldenrod, while the strange boy rescued the paper parcel as it bounced at his very feet. The covering had burst open, showing the contents, the neat bundles of white and brown bread sandwiches and a pile of crisp cookies.

Anthony was holding Brian by the collar, as Jane sat up and received in both hands the damaged package of lunch.

"Thank you," she said politely. "Won't you — won't you have one for saving them from Brian? They 're very good; Nora's sandwiches always are."

Her brother, coming up behind her, saw an odd expression cross the young stranger's face as he looked from Jane to the proffered food. For a moment it seemed a look impossible to read. Then the true

meaning of it came to Anthony so abruptly that he almost spoke aloud.

"Why," he thought, "he 's *hungry!* He 's starved!"

It could, indeed, be nothing other than hunger which brought that strange look to the other's face, — not the wholesome appetite that comes of a long walk in the clean, autumn air, but the half-famished hunger of one who has had nothing to eat for the whole of that day of tramping, or even of the day before.

"They do look good," the tall boy said somewhat shakily. He had been about to accept one of the appetizing roast-beef and brown-bread sandwiches, when he drew back suddenly. It seemed to occur to him that Jane's intent gaze, which had been fixed upon him for so many minutes, had pierced the armor of his secret. A slow red mounted under the sunburn of his face, and he shook his head in refusal.

"I 'm not — I can't have you believe —" he stammered; then, as Jane looked at him in startled wonder, he burst out, "You 're giving me food because you think I — I need it. I wondered why you were looking at me so."

"Oh no, no," cried Jane, covered with confusion in her turn. "I was looking at you that way because — because —" She would have stopped but was driven on by the distress in the face of the big boy. In his pride and embarrassment he looked like just that, — a big boy who is trying desperately to appear to be a man. "I suppose I have to tell you," Jane struggled on bravely. "I was making a wish about you and about

that pack on your back as you came up the hill. I was wishing on the three crows; Nora says when you wish on three crows maybe it will come true. It was — just something foolish out of my fairy book."

The other's drawn face relaxed; but even yet he could not quite smile.

"You must n't mind Jane," put in Anthony. "She is always mixing things in fairy books with things that are really happening. She knows better, but it 's a game she likes to play."

The young stranger turned toward Anthony and with the freemasonry of boys, the looks they exchanged seemed to say, on Anthony's side, "Yes, I know you are hungry. What of that? Lots of people are," and on the other's:

"It is true that I 'm half starved but I don't mind your knowing it. After all, you look friendly."

All that was said aloud, however, was first Anthony's remark:

"Nora would be pleased if she heard you had tried her sandwiches and liked them; every one always does." While the strange boy asked in return:

"Who is Nora? Your sister?"

"No," Anthony answered. "Nora — oh, Nora lives with us. She is n't any relation."

"And she is all the people who does live with us," Jane added.

The newcomer took a sandwich and bit into it with enthusiasm. "Whoever Nora is, she 's a wizard with sandwiches," was his verdict.

"You must have one of each kind," said Jane. "There 's roast beef, you see, and ham and cream cheese." She thrust a handful of them into his pocket. "Oh, be careful. Brian will have them yet."

The stranger pushed down the insistent red puppy and patted his head with the easy touch of one who loves dogs. As he munched his second sandwich, he looked up at the cabin above them on the hill and asked abruptly, "Who built that?"

"I don't know," Anthony answered. "We have n't lived here long enough to find out. I have asked several people too, but they can't tell me. They only say it is the oldest house around here; but whose it was has been forgotten, somehow."

The tall boy's appraising eye followed every graceful line of the wide roof, the spreading wings and the low door with its half-buried stone step.

"Not many of the old-timers made cabins that looked like that," he observed. "The man who built this one must have — must have been somebody."

He unstrapped his knapsack, brought out a sketch-book, and without further word sat down upon the grass at a little distance to make a picture of the house.

"I wish he would draw the apple tree," said Jane softly to her brother. "I like the house, but I love the apple tree. It is more — more of a picture than the cabin."

If the busy artist heard, he paid no attention, but became completely lost in what he was doing, until he

seemed to have forgotten that they were there. Now and then he was forced to push aside Brian's curious nose, thrust under his elbow, or between him and the page; but even that he did in an absent-minded way, as though he saw nothing but the little house and the sketch he was making.

Jane and Anthony would have liked to watch the progress of the drawing, but felt that it would not be good manners to be so inquisitive as Brian. Anthony was wondering how any person of such decent clothes and speech should be journeying on foot and without food. At a time when the most tattered and forlorn of the tramping fraternity could be seen on all highways, covering the country in automobiles as unkempt and ragged as themselves, it was strange, indeed, to see such a traveler as this. Jane's glance called her brother's attention to the comforting fact that the tall boy's hand went automatically to his pocket now and then, and that he was finishing the sandwiches in spite of his concentration upon his work.

There was silence for many minutes. Jane nestled up against the trunk of the apple tree as though she loved it like a person. Opening her book of fairy stories, she was speedily lost in them. She had outgrown some of the early nursery tales; but never was she to be too old for the Brave Tin Soldier, the Wild Swans, the Little Mermaid, or to love all the princes and peasants, toys and ducklings in that world whose creator is Hans Christian Andersen. Brian snuffed about in the fence corners, discovered a bone which he

had left there on one of his earlier expeditions, and settled down to happy gnawing.

Anthony, munching sandwiches also, sat looking about him for a little before he turned to his own book. The height of the autumn color had passed, so that the far, wooded hills were dull gold and russet, rather than the blaze of crimson and yellow that they had been only a week before. The sky was the brilliant blue that only clear October air can make it, blue given back in even more vivid color by the big river below.

Beyond the creek he could see a stretch of flat land, where a red-roofed farmhouse was set in a group of dark pine trees, with a tall, pointed silo near it, and a cluster of barns. The checkerboard of fields was some of it golden with stubble, some brown where hay had been mown, some black where the ground was freshly ploughed. Close to the edge of the creek, where the stream made a sharp bend around an elbow of stony land, was a small building that did not seem to belong to the prosperous farm group. Its crooked chimney indicated that it was a dwelling; its patched shingles and sagging roof showed that it was a mean and poor one. There was no smoke in the chimney, no sign of any one stirring about it; so that it seemed the solitary cottage was deserted.

From the gnarled apple tree above Anthony's head, slow-dropping leaves came down, one by one, flecking the dry grass with yellow-brown, lying in patterns on Jane's gingham dress, drifting over the dark red coat of Brian Boru.

Below, on the brush-covered slope leading down to the river, the quail were whistling to each other again — "Bob — white, bob — white" — their clear voices sounding fainter and fainter as they drifted away toward the low-lying farm lands beyond the mouth of Apple Creek. At the westward end of the pasture, the slow tinkle of a cowbell told where a kindly red and white cow, well known to both of them, was grazing comfortably on the slope where the green grass still showed a little among the brown. Across the sky there passed from time to time an arrowy pattern of wild ducks or geese, cleaving the light air on their long southward journey. They were only tiny specks against the blue; but their calling voices came down as clearly as though they were passing only just overhead.

For a whole month of Saturdays, the two had spent every afternoon of their weekly holiday here in Apple Creek Pasture. The little town lying by the riverside spread itself over the slopes of a small valley to the southward, where flat open lands had tempted the growth of building all in the opposite direction. Apple Creek Hill, in spite of its high and airy outlook, seemed to be a spot which no one appreciated save themselves.

On other days, Anthony had great press of engagements with the boys in his school; but his Saturday afternoons he spent in company with his sister, reading in pleasant quiet on the sunny hillside. Each was all the other had, since they had no family save for the distant and little-known kinsman who was their guardian. Neither of them could remember their

mother, who had died when Jane was a tiny baby. Anthony alone had flashes of memory of a cheery, handsome father who had followed their mother only a few years later. With Nora Carmichael, who kept house for them, they had come, only very recently, to live in Winstead, the small town whose faint noises came up to them upon the hill.

Anthony's eyes finally drew away from the far blue and golden landscape, and dropped to the opening page of his book:

"There was a dwelling of kings, ere the world was waxen old.
Dukes were the door wards there, and the roofs were thatched with gold.
Earls were the wrights that wrought it, and silver nailed the doors.
Earls' wives were the weaving women, queens' daughters strewed its floors."

On went the swinging rhythm, pouring out the magnificent legend of the great deeds of the Scandinavian race, of Sigmund of the unfailingly courageous heart, of Sigurd, his even more glorious son. Anthony was lost to any world save that of wind-tossed seas, mountain-girt fiords, battle grounds of mighty encounter, the sword of Odin and the dragon ships of King Volsung. A half hour went by, and he had not moved save to turn one page after another. He jumped when Jane finally touched his arm, and looked up dazed, the splendid poetry still singing through his brain, the clash of arms still seeming to sound in his ears.

"Look," she said, her glance lifting upward.

A flock of great, white birds was sailing slowly back and forth against the blue, all moving exactly together. They were wheeling earthward in great circles, dark when they slanted one way, shining white when the sunlight touched their breasts and the under side of their wings.

"They must be swans," Jane said, "and they look as though they might have come out of my fairy book."

Down out of the sky they came, past the brow of the hill, still all circling together, until they were just above the bar at the mouth of Apple Creek. Here their flight broke up into confused flutterings, as one after another dropped to the yellow sand, opened and closed its wings several times and finally settled down to rest after the long flight from who knew where. The whole bar was white with them; their plumage was like burnished silver in the sun.

Jane turned the leaves to her favorite and most thumbed story, the tale of the Princess Elise and her eleven brothers, who had been enchanted in the form of white swans. It told how she was to break the spell by seven years' toil, to make for each one a shirt of spun nettles, woven and sewn by her own hands, with never a word spoken during the long task. The page which Jane showed him was at the very end of the story:

"The crowd pressed around her to destroy her work," read Anthony, "but just then eleven wild swans flew down and perched upon the executioner's cart, flapping their wings. She threw the eleven shirts over the

swans, who were immediately transformed to eleven handsome princes; but the youngest had a swan's wing in place of an arm, for one sleeve was wanting to his shirt of mail; she had not been able to finish it."

"I wonder," said Jane slowly, "I have wondered a great many times, how that prince looked who had a swan's wing for an arm all the rest of his life. What did he say when people asked him about it? Was he glad or sorry that he had it?"

Anthony was used to Jane's wonderings; they were as busy as his own, although they moved in another realm, a region where the colors were brighter and where the glitter of magic had not yet faded. Although his superior years made him feel that he was much wiser than she, he never laughed at her imagining nor was he even tempted to do so. Jane was Jane, and one took her as she was.

"He must have found a swan's wing rather a trouble sometimes," he answered readily, "but in his heart, maybe he was proud of it. And perhaps it made it possible for him to fly a little."

"It would he hard to fly with one wing," returned Jane seriously. "Perhaps he just walked more lightly on the ground than other people. That would be nice. I should like to see a man with a white swan's wing."

A big voice broke in behind Anthony.

"You seem to be spending a busy afternoon, all of you."

The boy turned around to smile a comfortable, understanding smile in greeting for this friend who had

come up the hill from the town. They had been so intent upon watching the swans that they had not observed his coming or heard his light, quick tread on the dry grass.

He was a very big man, so tall, as he stood under the apple tree, that he had to stoop his head to avoid the drooping branches. In spite of being so long and loose-jointed, he moved with astonishing quickness and grace. He had a deeply lined face, a great shock of grayish hair, and kind, twinkling, gray eyes under heavy brows.

Although as yet they had not made many acquaintances in Winstead, they had already begun to regard Matthew Ballantine with intimate affection. He had come, at Nora's behest, to see about some repairs to the gaunt, dilapidated dwelling in which they had set up housekeeping, and he had remained to become their friend forever. Anthony would gladly have spent all his time at Mr. Ballantine's little office building with the mill and lumberyard behind it, where he carried on his business as a builder and contractor. Since, however, Mr. Ballantine was a very busy person, their meetings had not been many; yet the agreement of their thoughts was complete. Anthony himself felt that he was never accomplishing so much as when he was quiet long enough to think a little upon the many puzzles and wonders which filled his world of growing ideas. It was like Matthew Ballantine to understand just how busy he and Jane actually were, as they sat there under the apple tree.

The man shot a quick glance of curiosity at the young stranger who had only looked up for a moment from the task which absorbed him. Since no one volunteered any information concerning the tall boy, Mr. Ballantine asked no questions.

"What was this talk I heard of swans' wings?" he asked. He sat down beside them, his long limbs seeming singularly at ease and comfortable as he put one arm about his knees and threw back his bushy gray head to look at the sky through the tracing of sparse gold leaves.

Jane looked troubled, since she was not yet on such familiar terms with their big friend as Anthony, and since it was only to her brother and to Nora that she talked of her fantastic imaginings. Anthony did not wait for her to try to explain, for he had a question to ask. He motioned toward the little cabin.

"Who lived there?" he asked. "Nobody seems to remember."

"I remember," returned Matthew Ballantine slowly.

The strange youth looked up from his sketchbook. The mention of the cabin seemed to have caught his ear.

"It is curious how people forget," the man went on. "It is a good thing to remember, and think about, — what happened here when Abner Hood journeyed out of Maryland and came to live on Apple Creek Hill." He paused a moment, staring up at the little house above them.

"Even if I had not heard its story," he observed,

"I would feel that I knew something of the owner of that dwelling. Look at those chimneys: how straight and square they are, how they hold the house steady between them, no matter what winds may blow. It is because I make houses myself that I can see so much in this, a rude place enough, and not built for ease of living, but, to my eye, at least, telling a great deal concerning what manner of man built it."

The tall boy, looking up quickly again, met Mr. Ballantine's glance. There passed between them a look of comprehension as though the man's thoughts and the young stranger's had been the same. Both of them could read what Abner Hood, lover of beauty, pioneer by force of circumstance, and now long dead, had been able to put into the house which he had reared.

"Long before my time it was, a great many years ago now, that Abner Hood with his young comrade, Joel Davidson, first came this way seeking to make his fortune. He had been fleeing into the wilderness, driven first by actual enemies, later spurred forward by the tormenting thoughts and memories which, travel fast and far as he would, must always keep pace with him. It was in some small settlement on the Ohio River where Hood eluded the last of his pursuers, who were galloping on their blooded horses up and down the muddy streets of the town. In the shelter of a friendly cabin he put off his mulberry-colored coat, his frilled shirt, and his bell-crowned hat, walked out unnoticed in butternut jeans and coonskin cap, and, with Joel Davidson, took passage down the river for the

lands beyond the Mississippi. They say that, years after, the old woman who had given him the clothes got the coonskin cap back again, filled with gold pieces."

Matthew Ballantine stopped when he had got this far and moved to sit more at his ease with his back against the trunk of the apple tree.

"I started out this afternoon," he declared comfortably, "to walk over the hill and speak to Mark Lyman, at his farm beyond Apple Creek, and see how I am spending my time instead! When I was coming up the street, your neighbor, little Mr. Thrale, was working in his garden and asked me where I was going. 'You'll do it quicker if you take your car and go by the road,' he said. But I told him I was forgetting the use of my legs, on account of doing everything quicker by car, and that on a fine Saturday afternoon like this, for once a man could spend a little time and not be always saving it. And now see the time I've spent, and not even got to the farm yet. What shall I do about it? Tell me, Miss Jane, what do you think I had better do?"

Jane had sat listening attentively, although her eyes were not upon his face, as Anthony's were. She was watching the beautiful flock of white birds, preening and fluttering and talking to each other on the bar below.

"I think," she suggested wisely, "that you can take your car and go to Mark Lyman's farm by the road any day, Saturday or not, even if it is raining. And there might not ever be another Saturday just like this, when we could all sit here in the sun and look at the

swans down beyond the creek and listen to you talk. Don't you think you had better stay here and tell us the rest about Joel Davidson and Abner Hood?"

"I do," agreed Mr. Ballantine promptly. "John Thrale will stop me on the way home and ask me if I didn't lose time by walking. He is a persistent little man; when he gives you advice, he follows it up, and you can't get away from him. But I will tell him I didn't lose any time after all; I spent it to even better purpose than I had believed possible. You are quite right, Jane; there might not ever be another Saturday just exactly like this."

The young stranger had closed his book, and he also moved nearer the apple tree, that he might listen as Mr. Ballantine proceeded.

"Abner Hood," he explained, "had been master of a great mercantile business which had come to sudden ruin, dragging down to disaster the fortunes of many besides himself. There arose about his ears a great clamor of anger amid demands for punishment, of hot-blooded young men seeking to challenge him to a dozen duels, and of more sober old ones crying out that he should be cast into prison. Through the midst of the tumult he slipped away into the West and disappeared. It was his firm determination that those who had lost through his mistakes should have their own again, and it was his splendid dream that in the broad lands beyond the Mississippi a bold man would find fortune awaiting him. His young cousin, Joel Davidson, a boy scarcely grown, was the only one amongst his

friends and kinsmen who dared stand by him and share his venture. So the two had come, at the end of a long journey, to Apple Creek Hill, and had staked out their claim to the acres which they meant to hold."

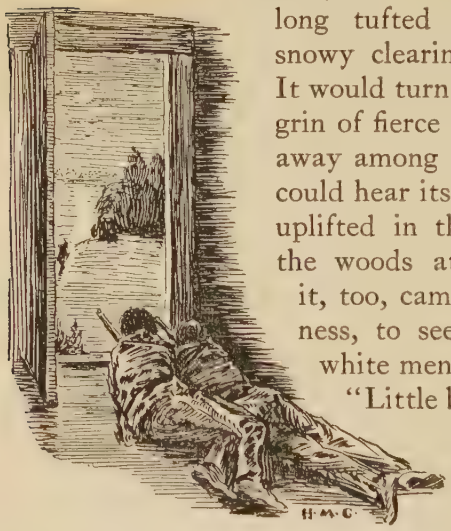
"Were there Indians?" Anthony wished to know.

"Indians and wild wood creatures, cold and starvation: in that first bitter winter these two faced them all. The red men had their village on the flat meadows beyond the creek where Mark Lyman's farm now lay; surly, hostile neighbors they proved to be. One tall warrior would come up the hill in the shelter of the wild crab-apple thickets, or slip through the evening shadows, sometimes merely to watch the two as they went about their work, sometimes to fire his defiant, singing arrows at the doorway when either one or the other ventured forth.

"Many a night the two would lie on the cabin floor with rifles loaded and ready, eying that single lank figure as it stole across the edge of the moonlight. They could never be sure that his silent-stepping comrades were not lurking close behind him, waiting for their leader's signal of attack. Abner Hood would whistle softly to himself as he peered down the sights of his gun; Joel Davidson would feel every muscle within him twitch and tingle as he strove to hold his weapon steady. But the yelling onslaught never came. The big, gaunt warrior was only stealing close, to see if cold, hunger and loneliness had at last weakened the courage or broken the strength of those two white men

who dwelt upon the hill. But not even an Indian's watchful eye could catch any sign of faltering.

"Joel used also to see, at early morning, an unfamiliar furry beast, heavy set, and with long tufted ears, crossing the snowy clearing below the cabin. It would turn upon him a snarling grin of fierce hatred before it slid away among the trees. Often he could hear its harsh yowling voice uplifted in the frozen silence of the woods at night. Evidently it, too, came near in the darkness, to see if these two bold white men still lived.



"Little by little"—here Mr. Ballantine warmed to his narrative, for this was the portion which lay closest to his heart — "little by little, in the numbing cold of the first winter, through the windy spring and the heat of summer, and finally in the long golden days of autumn, those two raised the walls of their new dwelling. Somehow they managed to build into the lines of that cabin on the hill, a touch of memory of the gracious and splendid mansion facing Chesapeake Bay where Abner Hood had spent his youth and which was still home. The usual clumsy stick-and-mud chimneys would not do for them. They toiled for long, long weeks, cutting

and carrying the flat blocks of limestone to make those two broad fireplaces and the big square chimneys which were to stand so long after them."

Matthew Ballantine looked up at the low, gray building clinging to the hillside above him. The glance of the unnamed youth followed his with the same absorbed interest, but Anthony fidgeted uneasily and urged him on with further questioning.

"How much land could they hold? Were they never discouraged or afraid?"

"From Apple Creek on the north, south over the hill, and through the valley where the town of Winstead was later to stand, those were the lands which they could win by living on them for the prescribed number of years." Thus Mr. Ballantine made plain the law of homesteading. "Just what were the toil and suffering of those years no one could ever bear record. How they tramped the hills for game, how they doled out the slender stores of coffee and flour that they had brought with them, how unendingly they toiled together and took turns at cutting wood for the fire that above all things must never die. This was the most vital task of all, to cut wood and more wood and more wood still, although their arms ached and they reeled with fatigue.

"'Try to remember that every mile you walk, every blow you strike, is for those who are waiting for us in want, at home,' Abner Hood used to say to Joel, when ax or gun seemed ready to slip from their benumbed hands.

"Yet not even Abner Hood could always keep up a

front of unfaltering courage. Once, waking early, Joel found his companion gone. He set out to seek him, in the stinging cold, and found him busy at a strange task. Tall oak stakes marked the boundaries of the land they hoped to own; and from one to another of these, Abner Hood was tramping in the snowy dawn, driving each one deeper into the earth.

"'Were they not steady enough already?' questioned the boy, as he trotted behind, his teeth chattering.

"After a long silence his comrade answered, 'It is not

only the stakes that I am driving down. I am steadying my own courage and resolution.' And after another pause he burst out, 'What long labor it takes to make a wrong thing right!'"

There was quiet after those words, a quiet which not even Mr. Ballantine's eager listeners seemed moved to break. Brian Boru, in sprawling slumber with his head among the gold and russet leaves, gave a great sigh of sleepy content. The strange boy sat still, not looking at the cabin now, but staring afar over the river, deeply sunk in some distant thought.

The sun had dropped so low that there began to be a chill in the air, a growing reminder that this was autumn and dark was coming. The last ray had touched the ridgepole of the cabin and had slipped away again; the last clear quail voice had called, "Bob — white", in the brush below and had drifted into silence. With a sudden rushing of wings, the flock of swans arose, circling upward out of the dusk below in the ravine, out of the shadow of the hill into the high sunlight. Their plumage flashed white and shining as they swung into line behind their leader and stretched away for another long flight on the journey to the South.

"Young people," said Mr. Ballantine severely, "here you have let me spend the whole of that hour that I vowed was all I needed to walk to Mark Lyman's farm and back. And now there will be talk about our all being late for supper if we stop here any longer. Get up, the three of you, and Brian, and set your faces homeward."

All three arose at his bidding, yet the whole of the small company still stood watching the flock of great birds diminishing to tiny dots against the fading sky.

"Did Abner Hood plant the apple tree?" asked Jane suddenly. She was standing with her hands outstretched, idly catching at the golden, dropping leaves which twirled lazily as they fell from the branches overhead.

"Settlers, to hold the lands on which they had staked out their claim, were required to improve them from season to season. So the two in time ploughed fields, fenced a garden so that the deer would not trample it, and set out fruit trees, which finally covered the whole of Apple Creek Hill with white bloom. Those trees have all perished long ago from old age and winter storms. Only the stoutest one of all, which they planted before the cabin, has survived, very old as such trees go, but still holding its own in spite of wind and weather."

"Where were their fields?" Anthony inquired curiously, for the rough ground about them showed no trace now of any cultivation.

"They were down yonder where the town is. Probably after planting the trees, they did not do much to these steep slopes. No, except for the cabin and the old apple tree, the hill must look much now as it did on that October day, when the two landed below and came climbing up from the river. Often, within my mind, I have pictured those two, looking abroad across hill

"The hill must look much as it did when the two landed."

and wood and water, knowing that here was their journey's end and that here they must stop and do battle with that heavy trouble which had carried them so far. Just what did the fugitive, Abner Hood, feel at that minute, I wonder? I suppose no man can ever know."

"I can guess! I know how he felt!" The words came with such startling suddenness that the three friends turned amazed faces toward the tall stranger.

Scarlet color flooded the boy's fair skin. It was plain that the exclamation had broken from him in such involuntary self-betrayal that he was as startled as they. He stammered, then fell silent. It was as though he were trying, with no success, to frame some commonplace remark which could cover his unintended confession. He, it seemed, like Abner Hood, knew what it was to come to a journey's end and find that the trouble from which he fled must be faced at last. Once more he stammered, but no words would come.

"I believe," Matthew Ballantine's big, kind voice broke the uncertain silence, "as I have mentioned before, that Nora Carmichael will think very little of me if I bring you home in the dark. If you will come with us, my dear sir, we will show you the path through the wood and the last of the way to Winstead. It is to Winstead, I judge, that you are going."

"Yes," agreed the stranger miserably. "I — I suppose I am."

It seemed odd that one so weary and dusty should have such small enthusiasm for arriving at his journey's

end. But no one made any comment as the older boy fell in beside Anthony and as Mr. Ballantine, with Jane beside him, turned into the crooked path which led down the hill.

CHAPTER II

LAUGHING PIERRE

IT was necessary to walk in single file as the four threaded the narrow way through the stretch of bushy woodland which fringed the lower slope of Apple Creek Hill. The newcomer, walking before Anthony, asked a question over his shoulder.

"Are you sure about the name of this town? I thought, when I looked at the road map, that Mapletown was the next place. I didn't know I had come to Winstead yet."

"I am quite sure, because I live there," Anthony returned. "Mapletown is ten miles beyond." And in wonder at his companion's dejected tone he added, "Didn't you want it to be Winstead?"

"No," burst from the other, "I wanted Winstead to be miles away."

To this surprising observation there seemed no answer to make, so that the two boys plodded in silence along the rustling pathway, with Brian cantering in excited zigzags back and forth across the way. Bits of talk came drifting back to them, indicating that Jane had led Mr. Ballantine's talk back to the cabin on the hill. Anthony and his companion pressed forward and fell alongside once more as the little party emerged from the wood. They, also, wished to hear the end of that first dramatic adventure

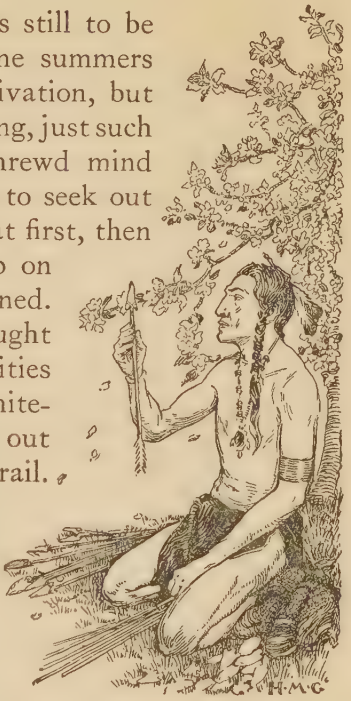
which had been played out by white men on Apple Creek Hill.

"Hood and his young cousin were a hollow-eyed, haggard pair when that first spring came," Mr. Ballantine was telling Jane, "but when the ice in the great river broke, when warmth and long days of sunshine came back to the world, it was proved that the two had conquered more than hunger. The Indian, Nagushah, who had once been their watchful enemy, now came striding up to their door and threw down a big roll of silky beaver skins. By signs he indicated that he would exchange them for one of the battered axes which stood in the chimney corner, those powerful implements which had kept the white men from perishing with cold during the bitter winter. The bargain was made with eagerness on both sides. It was the beginning of what grew to be an immense and valuable fur trade."

Mr. Ballantine turned a corner where the narrow street along which they were walking gave place to a broader one, lined with big soft maples, which like the apple tree on the hill, were dropping a rain of leaves upon grass and pavement and passers-by. Jane, walking by his side, kicked them up in great rustling windrows as her feet went through them.

"The tall Indian," they were now to hear, "became in time a devoted friend of the two white men. He would bring his arrow making, at which he was the most skillful in his village, and would sit under the young apple tree, chipping away at the white or red stone and

showing Joel all the differences between bird arrows and buffalo arrows and war arrows with their special bravery of painted feathers.



"There were hard winters still to be passed through and toilsome summers and years of danger and privation, but success came after long waiting, just such success as Abner Hood's shrewd mind had foreseen. Settlers began to seek out the prairie country; a few at first, then a flood. A town sprang up on the lands which the two owned. Puffing white steamboats brought cargoes from the eastern cities to its landing; trains of white-covered wagons streamed out from it over the westward trail. The place became the center of supply for a vast back country where prosperity grew and grew. Abner was a far older man and Joel had ceased to be a boy, when at last they journeyed back to Maryland, true to their promise to restore the fortunes of those who had suffered loss so many years before. And, as I have said, a wondering old woman got back a worn coonskin cap all filled with gold pieces and was never tired of telling and retelling that strange tale for all the rest of her life."

"Oh, oh," Jane skipped with delight over the successful conclusion of the hillside adventure. "And what did people say to them when they came home again?"

"There was no talk of duels now; Abner Hood was made a hero; he was feasted and praised and called both brave and wise. Sometimes, in the stately parlor of the old house, in the midst of a flutter of admiring ladies and the deep-voiced praise of a dozen men, Abner would look across the crowded room at Joel, and Joel in turn would hear, within his memory, a sound that seemed to lift above the talk and laughter and movement in the great room. It would be the harsh clang-clang of a heavy mallet, driving stout oaken stakes into frozen ground, a sound that echoed back from a snow-covered hillside, rang across a vast ice-bound river, and seemed to fill the whole of an empty, cold, and desolate world. That sound, Joel Davidson would bear in his heart to the end of his days."

Mr. Ballantine stood still, for they had all come to a gray house standing by itself upon a corner, high and narrow as no house in a small town should be. Its roof had uneven gables; while an irregular bay window or two sought to decorate its dingy front. The entrance was too small, and the windows were of odd sizes and few in number, telling of badly lighted rooms within. A sagging wooden fence ran all about the garden, with two posts, not strictly upright, framing the place where a gate should have been, but where no gate was.

A young woman was at work sweeping the walk which led from house door to gate. She was an erect, vigorous person, with half-curling, reddish hair; she was spare of figure and quick of movement. She looked up at the approaching group and smiled, a radiant smile that lit her thin and somewhat colorless face.

"I've brought your children back, Nora," called Mr. Ballantine cheerfully. "They would have kept us all on the hill half the night, if I had allowed it."

Nora came to the gateway. "I think you would all have had a feeling inside you that would have brought you home at supper time," she replied. "I know all the great and wonderful things the three of you have been talking of and dreaming about, there yonder above the river; but your minds would have begun to run on hot, buttered toast before a great while longer."

This was Nora Carmichael, who, as Jane had said, "was all the people who lives with us." She had come, as a very young nurse, to care for Jane when she was a baby and when Anthony was so small that he could

not now remember a time when there was no Nora. On the death of the children's mother, she had shouldered the burden of the whole housekeeping, and when, two years later, their father had gone to join that sweet, laughing mother, without whom he could not live, it was Nora who had taken charge of their entire welfare. A certain vague person, Mr. Jonathan Jarvis, who was called a guardian, a term rather meaningless to them, had some voice, they understood, in the arranging of their affairs. But it was Nora who watched over them, who tended them when they were sick, who kept them safe and happy.

When, for some reason that no one made clear to them, that familiar, delightful home they had always known was suddenly broken up, it was Nora who determined on coming to Winstead, the town where the children's mother had been born and where she herself had grown up. Perhaps she thought the task she had undertaken would be more easily performed among friends and familiar places; perhaps she felt that the unpretentious life of a country town made a better home for children without father and mother than the busy, striving suburb where they had lived before. A month ago, they had arrived in Winstead and, driven by Ned Wade, guiding spirit of one of the town's few taxis, had come rattling up to the door of the high-shouldered gray house.

Jane and Anthony knew that the dwelling had been chosen by Mr. Jarvis, their guardian, who had come before them to Winstead and had decided where they

were to live. For some little time they neither came in nor went out without eyeing the gaunt, dreary place with disfavor; but they had, by now, grown used to it and accepted it easily as home. The leaky gables had brought about Nora's sending for "someone to mend the roof", a summons which had produced Mr. Ballantine and immediate friendship.

Even now, after so much of the afternoon spent in his company, Jane and Anthony were unwilling to leave him.

"We are just going to walk down to the shop with him," Anthony said, while Jane added:

"We have lots of things to ask him still."

Nora nodded consent. She looked searchingly at the new boy, whose name no one had mentioned since, so far, no one of them knew it. She seemed to satisfy herself that he was a fitting companion for her charges, merely warned, "Don't be late," and continued her sweeping.

"The leaves fall rather faster than you can sweep them up, Nora," Mr. Ballantine said.

She laughed gayly.

"Perhaps I am sensible enough to think that there may be fewer to sweep to-morrow; perhaps I am foolish enough to like to hear them crackle under my broom. Make haste with you all. Can't you smell the gingerbread in the oven?"

They all walked on together, the young stranger with them. He had, as yet, said nothing of where he wished to go.

"That 's Nora," Anthony explained to him briefly, and rather unnecessarily.

"She — she 's great," he returned with enthusiasm.

"She just is," Anthony agreed.

Jane was already busy with questions. "Did n't Abner Hood or Joel ever come back here? Did they just go right away for always?"

"No, they came back, Abner Hood only once or twice, Joel more often. Abner still owned all sorts of things hereabouts, a farm or two, interest in a steamboat line, and the cabin on the hill. Everything was sold at last, except Apple Creek pasture. He did n't want to part with it, somehow, while he lived; and after he was gone, the town had begun to grow in the other direction, so it never seemed to be wanted by any one.

"His family, back in Maryland, still own it, and I take care of it a little for them. The ground is rented for pasture and that pays the taxes. Once, when I was traveling near Baltimore, I went to look up his people. I saw the old place where he had lived except for those years in the West, and I saw his portrait, a very fine gentleman with a high stock and a great bunch of watch seals, one that you would never guess had worn a coonskin cap and knew so well how to swing an ax."

Anthony wished to know, "How do you happen to be able to tell us all about him? Was Abner Hood — do you belong to him?"

"No," replied Mr. Ballantine. "Neither Abner Hood nor Joel were any kin of mine." He was walking

very slowly, unwilling also to bring the talk to an end. Close before them was a little low building with casement windows giving on the street. A rambler rose which clambered over the door quite obscured the sign — M. BALLANTINE — BUILDER.

"I will tell you how I came to know of Abner Hood. On a certain evening, perhaps three years after the two had built the cabin on the hill, there came to their door a young Frenchman, asking for a night's lodging. He was not a trapper or a trader, as were most of the French voyagers who passed that way; he was merely a young man seeking adventure and a home in the new country. He was as destitute as they had been when they first reached that spot; for he owned only the clothes he wore, the pack on his back and the fiddle under his arm. He was, by trade, a gunsmith, clock mender, mechanic and tinker of a dozen different sorts. He mended a gun for Abner Hood in return for his hospitality, and after supper he took up his fiddle — no one could call such a worn and battered thing a violin — and played all the gay songs and dances which they had so long left behind them. The little house resounded with music and merriment that night, for the fiddler was the soul of gayety. Pierre Bellefontaine was his name. Laughing Pierre, people thereabouts came to call him.

"He had grown weary of roving now, and, in the end, he settled down on a small plot of ground which Abner Hood sold him, to be paid for at such time when he could gather sufficient means. There was already a handful of houses in the little settlement, and the

stream of westward travel had begun. He found work to be done for the people setting forth on the overland journey, wagons to be repaired, guns to be tinkered, a hundred tasks which brought him a living. He and Nagushah, the Indian arrow maker, became great friends, and would often work together under the apple tree, each toiling at his own trade. After his day's labor was done, Pierre would play his fiddle at merry-makings for all the countryside round about, dances where the only music was his single, scraping fiddle, and the thunder of stamping boots on the rough, board floors.

"In all good time, this Pierre Bellefontaine became my grandfather. People who knew him shortened his name, for their own convenience, finding Bellefontaine too long. He had a son, whom he taught to play on his old fiddle, from the moment he could hold a bow. The boy could, in a very little time, outplay his father, and before he was grown, it was plain that he had within him the soul of a great musician. He was already set well upon the road to fame, when he died, a very young man, leaving a wife and little son. There was much poverty for those whom he left. The old grandfather was too poor to be of help to the little household; it was a hard struggle for that young mother while her boy was going to school. Things went better when at last he grew big and was able to take on his shoulders the support of the family. That boy was myself, as you may have guessed, and that is the last word of my talk, for it has brought us home."

They had come to the door of the shop building, which stood at the corner, with Mr. Ballantine's small white house beyond. Old Tom Riley, his single clerk, had lit the light inside and was just departing down the street. The big desk, with bookshelves behind it, and the long drawing table could be seen within. The light from the green shaded lamp streamed through the open door and fell upon the group on the walk.

"And now, young man," said Matthew Ballantine, turning to the tall boy who had accompanied them so far, "where is it that you are going? Can we help you find the place you have come to seek?"

The young stranger — and in the lamplight now he began suddenly to look very young indeed — stepped forward. He seemed to find it difficult to speak; for he hesitated and choked, like one whose throat is dry with nervousness and excitement. He got the words out at last:

"I came to see — I am looking for — a man named Matthew Ballantine. Can you tell me where to find him?"

"Why," returned the other in surprise, "did n't you know — I 'm Ballantine. What can I do for you?"

"I wanted to talk with you — about a certain matter of business." The words seemed to come with even greater difficulty; but he managed to add, "My name is — Roger Jarvis."

Anthony could never have believed that Matthew Ballantine could suddenly look so unlike himself. His face set in hard lines and his great eyebrows drew

together. Even his voice sounded as they had never heard it sound before.

"Roger Jarvis," he repeated. "And is that any name to conjure with, here? Is that any name to bring to this house and look for a welcome?"

"I did not look for a welcome," replied Roger. He spoke quite steadily now. "I only ask that you let me tell you what I came to say."

Matthew Ballantine stood silent for a moment. "I suppose I can do that," he said. "Yes, I will listen, at least, to what you have to say. Come inside."

He stepped over the threshold; Roger followed, and the door shut sharply behind them.

CHAPTER III

NORA-WHO-LIVES-WITH-US

ANTHONY and Jane walked home through the dark, wondering much about the unknown boy and the strange way in which their gentle-tempered friend, Matthew Ballantine, had received the news of who he was.

"Jarvis is no name to conjure with, here!" Anthony echoed that exclamation within his heart, for Jarvis was the name of his guardian, the tall, chilly-voiced, steely-eyed man who was in charge, in some way that guardians are, of the affairs of himself and Jane.

The autumn evening was cool, but very still. They could hear a steamer whistle at her landing; then, as they passed a street leading down to the river, they saw her at the far end of it, a bright picture, picked out against the dark with lines of glittering lights. Her red and green lamps slipped out of sight, as, with a gigantic sigh, she swung out into the river, and disappeared beyond the narrow opening that framed the view. Anthony and Jane stood watching until she was gone and then hurried onward. Even though the minds of the two were full of all the things they had heard and seen that afternoon, their thoughts, as Nora had prophesied, began to hover about the picture of hot, buttered toast and the enticing smell of gingerbread.

The supper table looked like a small island in the large, bare sea of the big dining room, but a very cheerful island, well provided with all the necessities of life. The house, as Jane said, "was about twelve sizes too big for them," and so was most of the furniture. It had been rented, furnishings and all, for this small household, by Mr. Jonathan Jarvis, who had always a better eye for a bargain than for the comforts of life. The place had been hastily and poorly built at a certain period of the town's prosperity when showy but tasteless houses had gone up like mushrooms in all directions. Most of the others had been altered and adapted to more modern living; but this one, with its jumble of ornate gables and bay windows outside, and complete lack of comfort and convenience within, had stood untouched and long untenanted. The cheapness of the rent had caught Mr. Jarvis' fancy; so that, when he came to Winstead to make arrangements for Nora, Jane, and Anthony to live there, he had passed by more than one cheery-looking cottage and had settled upon this decayed mansion, even as Bill Watson, the house agent, and the puffing taxi waited.

Nora had toiled early and late to make that ten-years-empty dwelling fit for her precious charges to live in; toiled as no one would ever know, save perhaps some other woman who had kept house in the same sort of abode. The furniture was like the house, oversized and gloomy, big stiff chairs with the stuffing protruding from their interiors, great beds with enor-

mous, carved headboards and an infinity of hills and valleys in the creaking old springs.

While Nora had labored at washing the tall windows and scrubbing the splintery floors, sighing much to herself but never complaining aloud, Jane and Anthony, after helping her all they could, had set about exploring the low-roofed, dusty garret. Here they had discovered a few articles of more friendly and comfortable aspect, a little mahogany bed with twisted spindles just big enough for Jane, a moon-faced clock, six feet high, lying upon its side under the eaves, with spiders' nests among the works, and the round table with a scalloped edge from which they were now eating their supper. The four glass candlesticks, somewhat chipped, but still possessed of their dangling prisms, had come from the same storehouse, where many pleasant old things had evidently been tucked away to make room for articles of the over-ornamented fashion prevailing when the house was new.

As they sat about the table, they could hear a comfortable crunching under the window, where Brian was having his supper outside. In his activities of the afternoon he had become overheated and, on the way home, had looked for some agreeable way of cooling himself. At some house which they had passed, the owner had been washing his automobile before the door, leaving a wet puddle in the dusty street. Here Brian had thrown himself down in ecstasy, and had risen smeared with mud, dripping and happy. Small wonder that Nora, who had been on her knees all

afternoon, scrubbing the long halls and stairs, had decided that the dog must stay outside. Jane and Anthony had rubbed off a large portion of the mud; but even they were obliged to admit that Brian was scarcely fit for general society. Anthony knew that Nora had taken him a specially bountiful supper to make up for her decree of banishment.

Jane was busy giving an account of the afternoon, a narrative in which strangers, hawks, sandwiches and Indians were curiously mixed together. Although Nora could not possibly have followed the thread of Jane's story, she listened with great interest, and gleaned enough from the varied details to comment concerning the boy who had come over the hill from nowhere in particular.

"Hungry, did you say? Well, I hope Matthew Ballantine asks him in, and his mother sets a good, hot supper before him. What sandwiches you gave him could n't stay a growing boy long."

Jane considered.

"Mr. Ballantine really hardly talked to him as though he were going to ask him to supper," she declared gravely. "And I don't think he was a growing boy, Nora. He looked as though he had grown a good deal, not very long ago, but was about old enough to stop."

"And his name," asked Nora, "did n't he tell you that?"

"Not till just when we were going away," said Jane. "I have n't got to that yet. Had n't I better go back to where the Indians were coming?"

"Tell me his name first," urged Nora. "And then we will hear all about the savages. I like to know who it is you are talking to, when you meet strangers on the hill."

"His name was Roger Jarvis," returned Jane, "but the Indian's name was Nagushah, Nora, and he could make arrows."

"Roger Jarvis," Nora repeated, looking startled, "why, that could n't be —"

"He did n't seem anything like our Mr. Jarvis, Nora," Jane assured her. "And that Mr. Jarvis never said anything, did he, about such a person coming here? Did he tell you anything about him in the letters he writes you?"

Anthony had been listening with only a portion of his attention to the talk of the other two, but he dropped in a remark of his own now. "That his stenographer writes, you mean, Jane," he corrected. "A person as busy as Mr. Jarvis could n't have time to write, himself — 'Yours received and contents noted. Check herewith enclosed' every month, would he, Nora? He just signs his name, very big and black at the end."

"No," said Nora, "he has said nothing about his family affairs."

Anthony was thinking vaguely how pleasant and cosy the corner of the big room seemed to be, made so by some magic of Nora's which he only half felt and did not at all understand. Somehow it was a very little like that dear house that they had left behind; although there was nothing here that had been

there, except himself and Jane and Nora. Without being able to put the matter very clearly even in his thoughts, he realized a little of what Nora did for them, the hard work, the devotion, the unfailing cheerfulness which she bestowed so ungrudgingly upon them. He did not have any definite idea of why or how she came to be in sole charge of their daily comfort. He and Jane explained her both to themselves and other people as "Nora, who lives with us." That was enough.

Supper was almost ended, when a pause in Jane's chatter made it possible to hear a sound in the street outside, — the unmistakable rattle of Ned Wade's taxi. It approached, wheezed, snorted and, with a dying sigh, stood still at their door.

"Who in the world, at this time of night —?" Nora was beginning, when the doorbell was jerked by an emphatic hand. In this house, the doorbell was a handle pulled with a squeak and a jangle, instead of being a button pushed with a cheerful tinkle as in more modern dwellings.

Nora went to admit the visitor. The two, sitting at the table, listened silently and in a moment heard a man's voice talking to her in the hall.

"It 's Mr. Jarvis!" cried Jane, in tones of little less than horror. Without more ado she got up and fled into the kitchen, a region which she always sought when Mr. Jarvis' dominating presence bore down upon them. Anthony would gladly have done the same, but a certain sense of responsibility made him follow Nora

into the hall. He did not like the way his guardian talked to Nora; and he came to her side with a vague feeling that he must protect her. Yet Nora, very courteous, yet very brief in her greetings, very erect and with her square chin looking very firm, seemed quite a match for Mr. Jarvis.

She ushered him into the small room next the door, which made a cosier living room than the vast dingy parlors beyond.

"Light the fire, Anthony," she directed. "Let me take your coat, sir."

There was little said while Anthony put a match to the carefully laid kindling, and watched the flame creep under the log.

"A fire is hardly necessary, so early in the season," commented Mr. Jarvis, who had sat down in the big chair near the hearth. Yet he held out his hands to the cheerful blaze, and Anthony could see that they trembled a little.

The boy got up and withdrew to the tall chair next the door, where he sat down. It was as far from the guest as he was able to go, without departing entirely.

"I have your last month's accounting, Nora," began Mr. Jarvis. "It seems that it is costing rather more to live here than I had imagined."

"It is not cheap to live anywhere, in these days," said Nora. "We have got on with as little as we could."

"You have not put anything into repairs on this house, have you?" he asked. "That is not necessary with the rent we pay."

"The landlord repairs so little that I have had to do something," Nora told him. "The roof leaked so that Matthew — so that I had some one come to mend it."

Mr. Jarvis frowned. He would have been a strikingly handsome man with his broad shoulders, big, well-shaped nose and high forehead had it not been for a certain expression which he always wore.

"He looks at you as though he did n't like you," Jane had said of him. It was true that their guardian had a way of regarding people with a keen, disapproving glance which seemed to say, "What is it you want from me? Whatever it is, you shall not have it."

As Anthony looked at him now, he thought that there was something in his face akin to the hawk he had seen at such close quarters that afternoon, swooping down upon the quail. Like the quail just before the hawk came in view, he himself had a feeling of uneasiness, of dread of he knew not quite what, as though their small household was not safe when Mr. Jarvis was near. And he felt that Nora, in spite of her steady voice and calm face, was feeling the same.

"You should not plunge into expenditures like that without consulting me." The man by the fire paused after he had said the words, as though to make what followed more emphatic. "I am rather dissatisfied with the whole experiment; I never approved much of the plan of your coming here to live."

"But the children must live somewhere, sir." Nora was standing respectfully as she talked with him, and

she spoke as one who had discussed this subject often before.

"Yes, yes, I know." He went on more slowly. "I have explained to you that the children's income, which their father left in my hands, has been much reduced by an unlucky investment. It does not mean merely that their old home had to be given up; it means even more economies than that, greater than you seem to realize."

"Such as what, sir?" There was open apprehension now in Nora's tone.

"An arrangement has recently been suggested by some cousins of mine, rather distant cousins of whom you doubtless have never heard. There are two families of them, living in different towns; they have each written to me saying that they would take the children to live with them, for a consideration, of course, but for less in the end than your housekeeping seems to cost. I am considering accepting their offer."

"They would take Anthony and Jane?" repeated Nora. "Do you mean together — or apart?"

"Apart," said Mr. Jarvis.

A slow chill crept over Anthony, beginning at his toes and creeping up to his heart. To be apart from Jane, sweet, dreaming, trustful Jane! To send her to strangers who would laugh at her imaginings, who would never understand her, or love her, or comfort her! He could battle for himself, perhaps, but to give up Jane — *Jane!*

He would have cried out with distress, but Nora's horror was spoken before his.

"Oh, no, no," she exclaimed, "it could n't be! The children must be together; they have only each other now."

Mr. Jarvis had been staring into the fire; but he turned about now to regard her with a fixed, hard look that penetrated like a blast of chill wind. Yet Nora did not quail before it.

"Are you afraid of losing your position?" he inquired. "You have overmuch regard for a household in which you are merely hired."

"I am not hired. The children's mother asked me to stay with them until they were big, and there is nothing that can separate me from them. If there is not money enough to keep a home for them, why I can go out and earn for all of us. I have two strong hands, and a heart full of love for them."

She drew a long breath and regarded him with a look as steady as his own. He leaned forward in his chair, evidently astounded that any person should stand up so stanchly to resist his will. Anthony stepped forward to stand beside her. He could feel that she was trembling, in spite of her appearance of calmness.

"We will do without anything if we can only be together," he said. His voice sounded so husky and so choked that he did not try to say more. Mr. Jarvis sat staring at the two of them, as though slowly weighing his decision. It was a tense and desperate moment.

Mr. Jarvis sat staring at the two. It was a tense and desperate moment.

Suddenly Anthony felt Nora's trembling cease; he glanced up and saw her face clear. The look of courageous defiance was gone; she was once more quiet and respectful.

"Do you remember, sir," she suggested, "that you had to rent this house for the whole of a year? You would find it hard to get another person to take it; people tell me it has been empty for a long time. There would be more income lost by giving up your lease than by sending the children to somebody else — for a consideration."

There was a quiver of scorn in the last words, but so small a one that only Anthony's quick ears heard it. Mr. Jarvis seemed to be turning the matter over in his mind.

"I had overlooked that," he admitted. "Yes, it would hardly result in any profit to let the house go now. Well, we will go on as we are for a while, and see what the cost amounts to. Perhaps you can do better than you have been doing."

"Very well, sir," replied Nora. She did not protest, although Anthony knew that, even then, she had been having a hard struggle to make their narrow income suffice for their needs.

"What is the boy doing there, listening to our talk?" questioned Mr. Jarvis harshly.

"He thought it was only good manners to be present when you were here," Nora explained. "You need n't wait any longer, Anthony."

"Stop," interrupted Mr. Jarvis. He leaned for-

ward again in his chair, holding to the battered arms. Anthony could see that his hands were shaking even more than when he had held them to the fire.

"I have another errand here," Mr. Jarvis declared slowly. "There is reason for me to believe that my son has recently come to Winstead. Is he here? Are you by chance harboring him in this house? Don't speak for him, Nora; let the boy answer."

"I — I did n't even know you had a son," exclaimed Anthony in wonder.

"I never even met your boy but once myself, sir," put in Nora, "and that was when Jane and Anthony were very small. You do not understand how little the children have seen of you."

"But have you heard anything of Roger's being here?" Mr. Jarvis insisted. "Have the children brought home any word of him?"

"Yes, the children met Roger Jarvis in Apple Creek pasture to-day," she returned. "Anthony, tell him about the boy you saw."

"Was *he* your son?" Anthony's eyes opened wide. There was certainly little likeness between the two.

"Don't ask questions; go on. Tell me what you saw. Where is he now?"

The boy, very briefly, told of meeting Roger Jarvis on the hill. "He looked tired and dusty," he recounted. Some instinctive loyalty kept him from speaking of the young stranger's hunger.

The scowling man in the big chair smiled grimly as he listened to the tale. "So he is here, and safe," he com-

mented at the end. He was silent for a minute, then added in rather lame explanation.

"We — we had a disagreement of opinion over a certain matter of business honor. He thought that he knew better than I what should be done; and, on some absurd impulse, he — he went away from me. For certain reasons, I concluded he would come here, although I knew he did not have enough money for the whole of the journey. So he is with Matthew Ballantine?" He got up from his chair, walked to the door and stood irresolute. It was strange to see the usually positive and overbearing Mr. Jarvis rocked with indecision. At last he came back and sat down, heavily and wearily, by the fire once more.

"He has set out to seek his own destiny — let him find it." The words came out with a great sigh and he leaned back against the shabby cushion.

"Nora, that miserable train that brought me here had no proper comforts for a decent traveler. Twenty minutes for supper at a lunch counter, at some heaven-forgotten junction at the back of nowhere! Can you get me some dinner and put me up for the night?"

His voice sounded so tired and dispirited that Anthony was genuinely sorry for him.

"We will make you as comfortable as we can, sir," Nora returned cordially. "Anthony, will you go out and tell Jane to come in and say good night to Mr. Jarvis? Then you must both of you be off to bed."

Jane, after much persuasion, was induced to come in and shake hands timidly with their guardian, although

with her other hand she held firmly to Anthony's. At a look from Nora she dropped a carefully polite curtsey as she had been taught and said "Good night, Mr. Jarvis" under her breath. Then she ran out of the room in frankly terrified retreat.

Anthony also shook hands with the guest in his most dignified fashion. He tried to say, "We are glad you came," but the untruth stuck so hopelessly in his throat that he also spoke only a muttered, "Good night", and departed in almost too much haste.

Outside in the hall, he stopped Nora, who was hurrying to the kitchen.

"How can we help you?" he asked.

Even to his mind it was plain that, after a long day of hard work, it was not easy for Nora to prepare a dinner and to make habitable one of the big, desolate bedrooms.

"You can make a fire in the front room upstairs," she said. "That is all you can do. And don't — don't be troubled about anything, Anthony dear."

No one could throw herself into a mountain of tasks with more energy than Nora; no voice could be more tender than hers as she whisked by, hastening to her work. Anthony went upstairs as she had directed, carrying an armload of fuel.

"What did Mr. Jarvis want?" Jane asked, as she followed him.

"Oh, he was just talking to Nora about money, the way he always does," her brother replied. "We don't seem to have as much as we did."

Jane sighed. "When people have less, does that make them have to talk so much more about it?" she asked, and Anthony agreed that probably it did.

"And only think, Jane," he added, "that was his boy, who came up the hill from Apple Creek and threw his hat at the hawk."

Jane seemed scarcely able to believe it, and went off to bed marveling that any one related to Mr. Jarvis could be so unlike him.

Anthony went into the big bedroom to make the fire, for in spite of the warmth of the day, the night was cold, and the air of a room which had been closed so long still carried a hint of dampness. Nora had cleaned the big bare apartment once, but it was far from ready to be occupied by a critical guest who loved comfort. The boy realized that she would have to work for another long hour or two before the place could be properly ready.

He was clever at making fires, a fortunate gift which is denied to many people. He soon had a pleasant blaze crackling below the shiny, black mantel, whereon stood an equally shiny black clock which probably had not ticked for fifty years. Having made sure that the fire was well established, Anthony went away to bed. He had had a long day in the fresh October air, which should have made him drowsy; yet for some insistent reason, the longer he lay there, the more restlessly awake he became.

He could not help going over and over in his mind those words he had heard below — "Cousins who would

take the children in, for a consideration", "Together or apart?", "Apart." Nora had told him not to trouble; but how could he help being troubled over such an appalling misfortune as this? That same dreadful chill which had crept over him before took possession of him again. He felt real terror — helpless, hopeless terror — at the thought that they were all in the hands of a man who could do with them what he willed, and who cared for their happiness so very little. Their guardian was not a cruel man, Anthony knew; he simply was a person who did not believe in happiness.

Mr. Jarvis had given up the plan for the moment; but would he return to it? Or if he gave it up, would he devise something else, that had just as little regard for the desires and feelings of all of them? Would he take them away from Nora, who seemed to be the only person on earth who really cared for their being safe and well and happy?

The room about him seemed desperately big, lonely and dark. It seemed to grow bigger and darker every moment, full of the vague creakings and strange sounds which a room in an old house can give forth when all else is still. The loud comfortable ticking of his watch under the pillow could not drown them. Anthony was trembling now, as Nora had trembled, with anxiety and excitement. Crowding thoughts, each more terrible than the last, came tramping through his brain. The strain grew greater and greater, until he felt that he could not bear it. Jumping out of bed, he ran pattering in his bare feet to the door.

"Nora," he called softly, lest he wake Jane, yet desperately, lest no help should be near. "Nora."

She was coming quickly up the long stairs. She had finished serving Mr. Jarvis' dinner and now was making ready to prepare his bedchamber. For a moment she came into the boy's room, saw him return to bed, and tucked the covers in.

"Don't you trouble," she said again.

He was ashamed to tell her what panic had seized him, yet he was sure she knew it without words.

"I am so busy, Anthony," she said. He understood well just how much she wanted to stay and talk to him, just how weary and hurried she must be and how hard-pressed still.

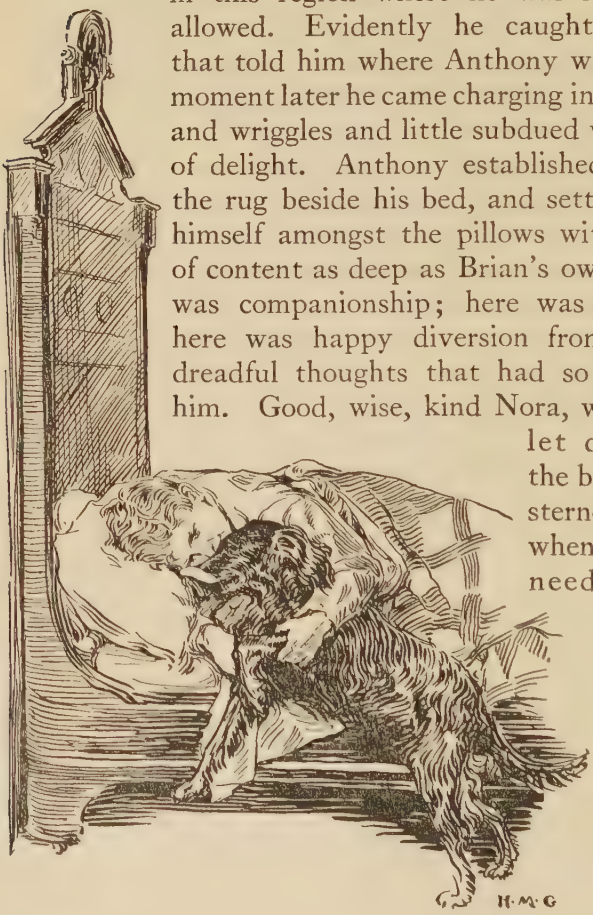
"It 's all right, Nora; go on," he said bravely. "But — but you don't really think — he — could do it?"

"No," she assured him, "he is not strong enough to do us such harm as that. Shut your eyes and think about something else, and we will talk about it more in the morning."

She went out, leaving Anthony sitting bolt upright under the patchwork coverlet, quite unable to think of anything else, but determined to be brave, none the less. He heard her light footsteps go up and down the long stairs, finally no longer audible as she went away once more to the kitchen, where there was still a great heap of dishes to be washed. He heard a door open and then shut far below; then — pat — pat — pat came four awkward puppy feet up the staircase, paused

a moment at the landing, then advanced pat — pat — pat again up to the top.

Brian came snuffing down the hall, a little at a loss in this region where he was so seldom allowed. Evidently he caught a whiff that told him where Anthony was; for a moment later he came charging in, all wags and wriggles and little subdued whimpers of delight. Anthony established him on the rug beside his bed, and settled down himself amongst the pillows with a sigh of content as deep as Brian's own. Here was companionship; here was content; here was happy diversion from all the dreadful thoughts that had so troubled him. Good, wise, kind Nora, who could let down all the bars of her sternest rules when a great need arose. After she had cleaned and scrubbed and polished all day, she would let a muddy



puppy come upstairs and sleep beside his master's bed, because that master had desperate need of some comforting presence. Who but Nora could so well have understood?

Two hours later, as she at last came upstairs to her room beside Jane's, Anthony's whispered call brought her to the door. He had been asleep, but had awakened when Brian, apparently wrapped in slumber himself, had felt her nearness through his dreams and had saluted her passing with a thump or two of his tail upon the floor.

"I 've been thinking of something, Nora," he said, something that evidently could not wait until morning, so that she stood at the foot of his bed to hear it.

"When I get bigger," he told her gravely, "I am going to get you a house — a real house that just suits you, and that nobody can take away from us. It will be new, and easy to keep clean and to keep warm, with a wonderful white kitchen and a hundred cupboards."

Nora smiled and fell readily into the spirit of the plan.

"I 'd like it, Anthony. Don't have the stairs too long or the windows too tall."

"Oh, it will have everything you want; it will be the best house in the world. I think to make it really fit for you, you good Nora, it will have a gold chimney!"

CHAPTER IV

THE SINGING LADY

THE next morning there was a mild bustle of departure, as Mr. Jarvis breakfasted and made ready for the train. As he was getting up from the table, Nora asked suddenly and directly:

"Would n't you like to see your son, sir? Anthony could fetch him with no trouble at all."

He wavered, caught unawares, but collected himself in a moment.

"No," he responded. The word was so dry and hard as to be absolutely without expression.

He went into the hall and began putting on his overcoat. Jane watched him from the safe distance of the kitchen door, with Brian, safer yet, taking refuge behind her.

"I look to you to — to have an eye on things, Nora," he said finally, "and to keep me informed."

Probably he would never answer more than the "yours received and contents noted" of ordinary custom; but it was plain that he hoped to have news of his boy and would look for it anxiously. Yet he was far too proud to ask directly for what he wanted.

"I will write you, sir, about them all," Nora assured him cordially. Then Ned Wade's jingling taxi sounded at the door.

Anthony went with Mr. Jarvis to the station, as was

only properly polite. He sat at his guardian's side, trying to make conversation but receiving very little attention as reward for his efforts. Ned Wade took some of the burden of talk from Anthony; for he had much to say over his shoulder concerning "changes since your day, Jonathan; did n't have nothin' like the new court house, when we was boys. I kinder miss the old one though, with its cupola and fancy fixin's over the windows."

"Why, did you ever live here?" Anthony asked Mr. Jarvis in surprise.

"Yes, long ago," returned his guardian briefly. He did not seem to relish Ned Wade's cheery familiarity, and answered him only when it was unavoidable.

"Drive down Jefferson Street," he directed at last, so abruptly that it cut in two Ned's lively account of the third marriage of Widda' Morris, some common acquaintance of a bygone time.

They rattled slowly through the quiet street, entirely empty in the Sunday stillness.

"That is Mr. Ballantine's shop — with the rose over the door," Anthony was pointing out. "He must be inside, for there is his old white bulldog lying on the step. I always know just what place Mr. Ballantine is in, because of Methuselah waiting outside."

Mr. Jarvis was leaning forward, staring fixedly at the little place as they passed. It happened that at that moment the door opened and Matthew Ballantine came out upon the step, bareheaded and leisurely in the peace of Sunday morning. He looked up, saw the two in the

cab and smiled slowly, a smile more of good-natured amusement than of greeting. Mr. Jarvis had looked quickly away and did not seem to have seen the man on the doorstep. Anthony observed a sudden flash of red go over his gray, colorless face and disappear. The boy was burning to ask, "Did you know Mr. Ballantine?" but managed to keep silent. Ned Wade, who talked busily without looking back, observed:

"Matthew keeps his health, real good. Looks to be a younger man than you, Jonathan, though we all know he 's a few years older. Takes awful good care of his mother, they say; and is doing well for a place like Winstead."

Anthony was certain, within himself, that Mr. Jarvis had driven this way in the hope of catching a glimpse of his son.

Ned Wade set them down at the station, where they waited for the train during what seemed to Anthony an endless time, in which neither could think of anything to say to the other. It was colder to-day; the air was clear and frosty; and Anthony kicked his heels together to keep them warm. As the train approached he pulled out his watch and consulted it gravely.

"Are you seeing if the train is on time?" asked Mr. Jarvis.

"No, I am seeing if my watch is," replied Anthony.

He did not quite see why his guardian felt it necessary to laugh at this. Mr. Jarvis had a disagreeable humorless laugh at best, which, just now, seemed out of place. But the panting train gathered him in, and

he was gone, with a great weight lifting from Anthony's spirit as he was carried away. The boy walked out of the station, still ruffled and indignant, holding the insulted timepiece in his hand.

His watch was his most cherished possession. Some boys he knew, Newton Thrale amongst them, carried gold repeaters; but they could never feel so rich in ownership as did Anthony. He had earned the money and had bought the watch himself; it was his in a sense that nothing else could be. That it had been purchased at a hardware store rather than at a jeweler's made it none the less valuable in his eyes. It was very round and fat, and had a large, contented-sounding tick. That it gained and lost time in a free and informal manner troubled him a little, but not very greatly. It was a good watch and, in spite of its faults, his very own. Most of the money earned for its purchase had come from digging dandelions from their neighbor's lawn, a tedious task, but profitable if pur-

sued long enough. Anthony was a patient and painstaking worker; he had a way of fixing his mind's eye upon the special thing which the task was to procure for him, and so forging bravely to the end.

As he went up the street, his watch stowed away in his pocket now, he was once more turning over in his mind the great plan of which he had spoken to Nora. It had been in his thoughts for some time, and had often been discussed between himself and Jane. Some blocks ahead of him, he could see the gray house, high and ungainly, mean and shabby-looking, even at this distance. It was no proper home for beauty-loving Jane, no fit place for neat, capable Nora. Surely there must be a way of getting them something better.

A bitter thought shot through him like the sting of a wasp. Unsuited as this house was to the people who lived in it, at least it was home, at least a place where they were together. Suppose Mr. Jarvis persisted in that idea that they would live better apart. He felt his heart turn cold again at the possibility; then he thrust it from him. He would not think of that save when he must; he would bend his efforts now toward finding some scheme that would bring what he wished — a house, yes, while he was planning it, he might as well cling to that first fantastically pleasant idea — a house with a gold chimney.

If he could earn a watch, why could he not earn a house, — in more time, of course, a good deal more time? There would scarcely be enough dandelions even in all the world to yield an amount sufficient for

his purpose. But there might be something else that a boy could do, something that would offer a somewhat higher wage. Oh, dear, why was he only thirteen!

There had been wind in the night, which had brought down the last of the leaves, leaving the trees bare. The silver maples with which the town was planted are trees of generous foliage, so that there were heaps and drifts of brown and yellow everywhere. Nora would expect him to rake their lawn to-morrow. It would be something of a task, even with what help Jane could give; but there would be a famous bonfire afterward.

Brian came hurtling down the street to meet him, having caught sight or scent of his beloved master as he turned the corner. Brian was a dog of impetuous nature, and had come headlong into Anthony's life and possession in much the same fashion as he was at this moment charging toward him.

It was on the journey to Winstead, when Nora, Jane and Anthony were standing upon the crowded platform of a great city terminal, waiting for the train which was to carry them on the last stage of their travel. They were hot and dusty and worn out with noise, jostling and dirt, so that Jane declared, almost in tears:

"I am so tired of seeing people hurrying past! It seems as though there were a million of them, and all bumping into me as they go by."

There had been a sudden stir amid the crowd, then a hush and an opening through the throng for some one to pass. A very distinguished person, it must be, for

whom all those hastening travelers, each intent on his own business, could stop and make way. Far down the platform, they could see the important group approaching, a lady resplendent with furs and orchids, a maid following with wraps and gold-mounted traveling case, two porters staggering under a load of bags. Somebody whispered a name, "Katherine Laguna, the great opera singer." To Anthony and Jane such a title meant little; but they watched and stared with the others, as the august company came close.

Suddenly, from behind the great lady, there darted what seemed to be a streak of red lightning. It was a young dog, terrified quite out of his wits by the crowd, the noise and the thunder of passing trains. One or two bystanders made vain snatches at his dangling leash; but only felt it run tingling through their fingers. The frantic puppy was making straight for an open gate and certain destruction under the grinding wheels of a locomotive, just rolling in.

"Stop him," commanded the voice of the splendid lady. "Stop him," shrieked the maid. "Stop him," a score of voices took up the cry, raising a tumult which echoed back from the walls of the vast station.

Anthony wasted no breath on shouting. He threw himself into the open space and caught the desperate fugitive in his arms. The dog, a half-grown Irish setter, with a shining red coat and eyes strained wide with terror, buried its head in the front of the boy's coat and crouched against him, trembling and whim-

The dog buried its head in the boy's coat and crouched against him.

pering. The magnificent lady approached and the crowd drew back respectfully.

"He 's frightened nearly to death," declared Anthony, forgetting to be shy. "I can feel his heart beating through my coat."

"I have no idea on earth what to do with the creature," said the lady. Her voice was rich and golden, even in speech. She was young, quite radiantly good-looking and most overwhelmingly well-dressed. Stooping over Anthony, she laid a cautious, white-gloved hand upon the dog's collar. The puppy winced and whined, and shrank closer into the boy's arms.

A big trainman standing by spoke his opinion. "It 's a way with those red dogs of Ireland; they 're bold in some things and timid as hares in others. A great noise and clatter sets them clean out of their senses."

"I 've had no end of trouble with him," complained the lady. Anthony felt the liquid beauty of her voice, though the sumptuousness of her furs and her orchids was entirely lost upon him.

He looked up and grinned reassuringly.

"He 's quieting now," he told her. "But he would have been under that train in a minute."

"He has been within a breath of being killed a dozen times," she said. "I cannot hold him; my maid cannot hold him; he gets so frightened that he snaps at the porters' legs and they won't hold him. I was taking him to my young nephew; I thought he would be a nice birthday present and I could think of nothing else; for my nephew has everything. He is a boy," she

added reflectively, looking Anthony up and down, "a boy about the age of you."

She paused for a long moment and seemed to be thinking. The noise and confusion, the staring crowd about her, seemed to disturb her not at all. She hummed a little tune as she stood looking down at the boy and the dog, considering deeply. The snatch of music was a thing of sparkling brightness, dropped without thought into the din of the vast tumult.

"Do you think a boy of about your age would like — a dog of about this kind?" she inquired at last.

Anthony nodded. He was beginning to be conscious of the multitude of eyes upon him.

"I am sure he would," he managed to get out, since she seemed to be waiting for a reply.

"And how should I get him to my nephew?" she said. "There are two thousand miles yet to go, and three changes yet to be made. Do you think the dog — or I — would survive all of that?"

Anthony could think of no answer to make, so he merely patted the curly ears of the puppy and hugged him a little closer.

"The dog and the boy understand each other, ma'am," put in the trainman. "Perhaps by good luck he is going your way."

Anthony shook his head.

"We have nearly got to Winstead, where we are going," he said.

The great lady cast a quickly observant glance over Anthony and his two companions; at Jane looking up

at her with large fascinated eyes, and stroking, with a timidly admiring forefinger, the moleskin fur on her flowing sleeve; at Nora, whose direct gaze met hers.

"You would do me the greatest favor in the world," said the lady, addressing Nora, "if you would accept the present of a valuable high-bred Irish setter dog, complete with collar, leash, pedigree and slightly excitable disposition. I cannot abandon the poor animal in a railroad station, though I confess I have been tempted to do so, and I cannot believe that his nervous system, or my own, will endure the strain of our traveling farther together. Will you let the boy keep him?"

"Anthony," said Nora, "would you like to have the dog?"

"Oh-h," was all that Anthony could answer.

"You are very kind," said Nora. She looked at their varied assortment of baggage, at the weary, dusty faces of her two charges, then at Anthony's pleading eyes. "We have only fifty miles still to go, and I think we can get the dog safely that far. Yes, we will take him and are very grateful to you indeed."

"It is I who will be forever thankful to you," returned the lady. She beckoned, with a regal gesture, to the man who had offered advice. Putting something into his hand she directed, "Take this gentleman and his dog to their train, and arrange that they be allowed to travel together. And to you," she gave her hand to Nora, "I offer gratitude from the bottom of my heart. There are not many women brave enough to add

a young dog to a pair of children on a long, hot journey."

She swept away, with a trail of respectful admirers and two newspaper reporters armed with cameras, following in her wake. Next day the picture section of the daily journals would carry photographs of "Madame Katherine Laguna, famous on three continents for her magnificent soprano voice, who passed through this city en route to southern California." There would be a smiling maid in the background of the picture, and two grinning porters, but no dog.

So it came about that when Nora, Jane and Anthony rattled up to the door of their new dwelling in Ned Wade's taxi, a red-coated puppy was the first to jump out and make himself happily at home. Anthony had traveled with him in the baggage car, seated on a trunk, with the dog's head laid against his knee. The big trainman who had arranged for this privilege offered a parting suggestion.

"He 's Irish — Irish every inch of him. You 'd best give him the name of Brian Boru."

As Brian cast himself joyfully upon his master, after the brief separation of that Sunday morning, Anthony received him with equal enthusiasm and equally strenuous caresses; for he and the puppy had come to be as one being. He felt as though there were some vital part of himself lacking when he set out for any place unaccompanied by his dog. Brian, during his best friend's absence, did little else but watch for his return.

The name of that chance benefactress of the beautiful

face, of the lustrous furs and the orchids, had quite slipped from Anthony's mind, although there remained a warm spot of recollection for a person who moved in such high places, yet who had been so readily able to understand a boy and a frightened puppy. And there still ran through his memory that snatch of music she had hummed as she stood there thinking, a fragment of a tune fallen from the rich treasure of her glorious voice. Half unconsciously he hummed it over to himself now, bringing back to his mind the astonished happiness of the moment when Brian was bestowed upon him. To buy a dog seemed, to Anthony, an impossibly unsatisfactory proceeding. It would be like attempting to buy a friend. A dog was not like any other possession such as a house or a watch. A dog happened to you, in the proper course of things, and if he were the right dog and you the right person, the pair became inseparable for life.

Little Mr. Thrale, their neighbor, was standing on his doorstep, regarding rather wistfully the rapturous greeting between boy and dog. He was a busy, successful man, with a family to whom he was able to give every possible luxury of comfortable living, but who seemed to have very little affection to give him in return. He looked as though he would be glad to have any one or any creature in the world show such delight on seeing him. He seemed so lonely, standing there inspecting his leaf-carpeted lawns, that Anthony felt obliged to stop and talk with him.

"You have a good many leaves, but they will rake

up quickly," he assured his neighbor cheerily. "I think we have more, even though our ground is smaller."

Mr. Thrale came over to the fence. "It is discouraging, Anthony, after I worked so hard yesterday, to have it all to do over again tomorrow," he observed. "My doctor said I must have more exercise, and as I don't care for golf or such games, he ordered me to take up gardening. I do not think I am much of a gardener by nature."

He was the sort of person who handled any tool awkwardly, who performed any outdoor task in the most difficult and inconvenient manner. A long stretch of years spent at an office desk, dealing with figures, figures that could be summed up at last into a good-sized fortune, had not prepared him to be a gardener. They had stooped his shoulders, stiffened his knees and thickened his waistline, as years so spent always will. Now he must turn to some other activity if he were to preserve his health; but he had sat so long chained to that single task, with those rows of figures before him, that he knew of no way to amuse himself in any other fashion. He could only pay a medical man to choose an occupation for him.

"I told the doctors I would take care of the place myself," he said. "But the garden seems to be so much bigger since I sent Hopkins away."

He sighed dejectedly. Anthony knew as well as did he that there was no hope of his having any assistance from his large, swaggering son. Newton Thrale

seemed to think of his father only as a source of supply for the things he desired, and, in return for all he received, seemed to regard his parent with a very thinly veiled scorn.

"Dad's a back number," was his very frequent remark. He was the sort of boy who was prone to make the same remarks often; for he had so few of them. Just why his father should be pronounced so old-fashioned was not quite plain; for Mr. Thrale seemed unfailingly and uncomplainingly able to present him with the latest models of motor cars, the most vividly up-to-date sports clothes, and any other of the rapidly changing playthings which his son so constantly demanded.

"I 'd walk rather than drive a car more than a year old," Newton was often heard to say; but no one had ever had the courage to ask him to carry out this terrible threat.

Anthony could not help feeling an inward pang at the news that Hopkins had departed. Mr. Thrale's superior English gardener had deemed himself too good to dig dandelions; thus opening the opportunity for the boy to earn his long-wished-for watch. He had to confess to himself that he had been counting on another dandelion crop in the spring, which would be, perhaps, one small step toward that dream castle, the house for Nora. But now that chance was gone. Before they could talk further, some one called to Mr. Thrale from the door, and Anthony went on.

Later, with the comfortable knowledge that all the

proper duties of Sunday morning had been fulfilled, Anthony sat down to Nora's savory dinner. Jane, opposite him, was saying grace, as Nora had so carefully taught them to do. As soon as she had finished, Jane observed eloquently:

"I am so thankful Mr. Jarvis did n't stay over Sunday, though we had to ask him to."

"You said that so soon after, it sounded as though it were part of the grace," Anthony remarked.

"I did n't mean it to be," said Jane. Then, being a painstakingly truthful young person, she was forced to add, "At least not exactly."

Next day, after school, there was no ball-play. Anthony was practically certain that every boy, like himself, was under strict engagement to "come home and rake the leaves." Winstead was a modest town with few people of wealth, so that a professional gardener was a rarity, and even a "hired man" was none too common. All such ordinary work as raking and snow shoveling was done, in every household, by such talent as each family afforded. It was to the boys between twelve and twenty that most of these tasks were allotted.

Only Newton Thrale, free of any such burden, swung away in his car, as the other boys set forth, none too eagerly, to attack the work at home.

"You 're poor fish, all of you, to stand for it," he flung back over his shoulder.

It was surprising that Newton should continue to favor a small-town high school with his presence; but

it was whispered that he had been found wanting at several better-known seats of learning. He often talked magnificently of this school or that, which he was going to attend "next year"; yet somehow he lingered on, exactly where he was.

Jane was already at work when Anthony reached home, as her school was somewhat nearer than his. The leaves were dry and crackling, not wet and matted as they can sometimes be, to the discomfiture of even the most industrious gardener. There were oak leaves, as well as the thick yellow carpet under the soft maples, sprinklings of brown elm and lemon-colored horse-chestnuts, these last having blown across from Mr. Thrale's garden.

Mr. Thrale was busy with his rake on his side of the fence; but he seemed to make very small headway in the clearing of his broad lawns. He waved a greeting to them when they first came out; and he stopped many times, so Anthony noted, to watch them as they went so vigorously about their task. Before an hour was past, the brown grass was swept clean and a great heap of leaves was piled up in the street, waiting for darkness and the proper time for bonfires.

They had no very great space to clear, for "The garden is skimpy, like the house," as Jane remarked.

Among the bare trees, the tall house stood out more gaunt and unattractive than ever. It looked curiously out of harmony with its neighbor, Mr. Thrale's dwelling, a luxuriously built modern mansion of broad roofs, rough stucco walls, and pointed gables.

"I would rather have the cabin on the hill than either one of them," thought Anthony.

Mr. Thrale, a toiling dot, had progressed so little with his labor, that Anthony and Jane with one accord came tumbling over the boundary fence, with their rakes and baskets, and set to work at his side.

"Now this is nice; this is delightful!" cried little Mr. Thrale, beaming. "It is n't so much that I get disheartened over there being so much to be done," he added; "but it is such a lonely job, working in a garden. There is no one to talk to, nothing to think about."

"Oh, I think about lots of things," Jane told him promptly; "whether the leaves are sorry that they fell off the trees, why a maple tree likes bright yellow and the oak trees dark red, where the grasshoppers have all gone, and what the birds feel like when there are suddenly no leaves to hide in." She stopped for breath, having given him only the upper skimming of her thoughts, as Anthony was quite certain. There were other more brightly colored fancies that she would tell to no one save those she knew and loved well. "What *do* you think about?" she asked finally. "It must be *something*."

"I just think about figures," Mr. Thrale admitted. "My mind goes over and over what sort of investments are best, and how much they yield in a year, and how much in a hundred years, and so on."

"*Do* you?" Jane stopped raking in round-eyed horror. "Why that is *arithmetic!* I thought you

never had to think about arithmetic again after you had once passed into the next class."

"I have been doing arithmetic for thirty years, my dear young lady, and now I can't stop," sighed poor Mr. Thrale.

Jane shook her head in profound sympathy.

"Do you suppose it is good for a garden to think about such things in it?" she asked anxiously. "I should think it might be hard for flowers to grow, if you were doing sums about interest and dividends and all such things while you were working with them."

"I have a great box of bulbs to plant in the next few days. I will be careful what I think of, while I am doing it," Mr. Thrale assured her. "Why, look, the lawn is half clear!"

He had been raking up a pile of leaves at the edge of the drive leading to the garage. Newton Thrale, returning home in his car, honked impatiently for his father to get out of the way, and drove the long roadster through the heap, scattering in a hundred directions all that had been so painfully gathered. Mr. Thrale made no remonstrance; he merely set about raking the leaves together again. Newton came out of the garage, stood watching them for a little, with his hands in his pockets, and then sauntered into the house.

That evening they lit their bonfires all along the street, the red and orange blaze stretching for half a block in front of their place and Mr. Thrale's. The jumping flames made everything look enchanted;

Anthony took on the appearance of a dancing demon, and Jane that of a small imp, against the quivering light. Nora, with her apron flying and her hair blowing in the draughts of hot air about the fire, might

have been a witch, silhouetted against the background of gold and crimson. Mr. Thrale resembled a plump little gnome, as he hurried back and forth, wielding his rake busily and keeping the fires piled high.

Newton Thrale came out presently, in very fine raiment indeed, bound for a festivity of some sort. He stood watching the flames as they would creep and glow,

then spring high in wavering brilliance, then drop again to send forth a cloud of fragrant smoke and steal forward to another pile of leaves. For a brief time he almost forgot to be scornful, but at last recollected himself, told his father that "Mother is waiting for you to play bridge", and vanished in the direction of the garage.

After Mr. Thrale had left them, Nora, Jane and Anthony sat in a row on the curb, their feet in the warm ashes, watching the last of the fire crawl up to the final heap of leaves. The air was heavy and sweet with the slow, drifting smoke that lingered about them in the soft dark. Anthony had filled the last pile of fuel with ripe horse-chestnuts which began now to go pop — pop, as the fire reached them.

"Do you know," said Jane, "I saw the new boy, Roger Jarvis, when I was going to school to-day."

"Where?" asked Anthony. He was full of wonderings as to Mr. Jonathan Jarvis' son; but he had been able to think of no way to satisfy his curiosity.

"He was working at that new building Mr. Ballantine is putting up, on the corner of Eastman Square," Jane told him. "He had on overalls and he was hammering away; but he looked as though he did n't know how very well. I saw one of the other men make him pull out some of the nails because they were n't right."

"Did he say anything to you?" inquired Nora.

"No. He was near the street, so he saw me go by;

but he only nodded, as though he did n't want to talk, and went on with his hammering."

"Mr. Ballantine must have given him work," said Anthony. "Was that what he came for, do you think? Certainly Mr. Ballantine was n't glad to see him at first. I wonder ——"

He could not even put his perplexity into words, so he gave up trying. He resolved to walk to school next

morning by way of Eastman Square and see if he could make further acquaintance with this Roger Jarvis. He had felt, that day on the hill, that he would like to have him for a friend, even though he was plainly some years older. He felt drawn to the strange boy still, in spite of his being Jonathan Jarvis' son. It was good to hear that Mr. Ballantine had not continued to feel toward him as he had so evidently felt at that first encounter. He would be good to Roger, Anthony was sure; they would get on well together. There was no jealousy in Anthony's nature; he was too simple and direct for that. He was glad to share his good comrade, Matthew Ballantine, with any person who deserved such friendship.

Jane, deliciously drowsy, leaned against Nora, and blinked at the fading blaze which had sunk now to the tiniest blue flame. Anthony sat erect, his hand on the head of Brian who, with his nose upon his paws, slept in warm comfort beside his master. Even in his dreams the dog would feel Anthony's hand stroke his head, and would move his tail lazily in the dry grass as acknowledgment of the caress. How peaceful and contented were two of the four; how safe and happy they might all feel, Anthony thought, were it not for that secret which he and Nora shared! Through all the lazy warmth, the sleepy quiet, that recollection kept stabbing him, — the picture of Jonathan Jarvis, cold and determined in his armchair, Nora's desperate question, "Together or apart?" and the dead weight of that harsh answer, "Apart."

The next day, Anthony went to school by the less direct route, and saw for himself where Roger Jarvis was at work. The construction of the new building was being hastened, to get the place roofed while the fine weather still prevailed. It was hard to believe that Matthew Ballantine, sitting in his little office, could be master of such a force of men and horses, trucks and concrete-mixing machines. It was a scene of busy, ordered haste, presided over most ably by Nels Nelson, Matthew Ballantine's big Swedish foreman. Anthony stood by the fence, listening to the musical rhythm of pounding hammers, smelling the clean fragrance of new lumber and watching the brick walls which were going up, showing the shape which the new building was to take.

Roger Jarvis, in new overalls, was working on the concrete forms, absorbed in the difficulties of a task at which he had no very great skill. The foreman stopped beside him, pointed out some mistake in his method and waited while he pulled out his nails and tried again.

"You vill learn," he said encouragingly, and went on. Roger looked very slight and young amongst the burly, grizzled workmen, in their battered overalls and with their big, hard hands moving with the smooth, unhurried ease of long-established skill. Yet he was laboring manfully to carry out his portion of the work, and keep up with the others. He stood so close to the fence that Anthony could see that one of his thumb nails was black from the bruise of a misdirected hammer.

During a pause, while some new beams were being hoisted into place, Roger looked up and saw the younger boy watching him. He smiled, but did not offer any conversation.

"Is everything going all right?" Anthony asked rather awkwardly, and the other returned, "Yes, thank you," but said no more.

As work began again, Anthony saw a big fellow in a dirty jumper blunder against Roger and offer the disagreeable comment:

"You 're mortal awkward! I can't see why Matthew Ballantine ever gave *you* a job."

Roger flushed up to his fair hair; but he plied his hammer and did not reply. Anthony, fuming, wished to say something, but found no adequate words would come to his aid, and walked on. He could see that it was no easy task to which Roger had set himself. Why had he done it? That was a question without answer.

Day after day Anthony passed that way to school, and always received a greeting or a nod from Roger, even when he was working at a distance. It finally seemed as though he watched for the younger boy to come, and looked forward to the smile of a friend in all that busy company of strangers. Once Anthony saw a big rafter being lowered, saw that it was swinging out of line and saw Roger give it a deft push at just the proper moment, so that it dropped exactly into its place. He heard the foreman say, "Vell done," and was as pleased as Roger with the praise. Once, as he

came home, in the afternoon, he saw that work had ceased for the day and that Roger was walking down the street before him. The older boy looked back, raised his hand in greeting, but turned a corner quickly. It was plain that he was steadily avoiding any opportunity for talk.

CHAPTER V

BEFORE SUNDOWN

SINCE Anthony and Jane were a very usual and very human brother and sister, they did not manage to live always in complete harmony. There did occur, on occasions, those differences of opinion or desire which are not entirely unknown in even the most well-ordered families. It happened that there was just such a brief flurry of disturbance on the afternoon of the next Saturday.

Anthony had been so thoughtless as to laugh at Jane's most cherished doll. The beloved Belinda had lost an eye and part of her scalp; but except for this slight misfortune, she was just as beautiful as she had ever been. No one had ever been quite sure as to the cause of poor Belinda's loss of eye and hair, although darkly suspicious circumstances pointed toward Brian Boru. However it was that she had come by her afflictions, she was all the more dear to the heart of Jane, who declared stoutly that she was the finest doll in existence. Yet Anthony was careless and cruel enough to laugh at poor Belinda's damaged beauty, which thoughtlessness had produced a burst of tears from Jane.

There had followed reproaches, indignation, a brief exchange of hot words and more tears. Brian, the real culprit responsible for the whole difficulty, became desperately distressed over the quarrel and impartially licked the faces of both and caressed them with large clumsy paws, imploring them to think better of what they were saying. It was Anthony who cooled down first, as he always did. He apologized handsomely, and, with sincere repentance, sought to comfort Jane. But the matter was not so easily set right. Jane's affection for the battered doll was deeper than any person could easily imagine, and that affection had been thoroughly hurt. She accepted Anthony's apologies, but remained tearful and offended.

Anthony did his best to carry out his share of the reconciliation, but, when all his attempts came to nothing, he finally gave up his efforts.

"Just go on to your football," Nora advised him. "She needs time to get over it. Perhaps she will be happy again when you get back."

But when the football practice was over and he returned to the house, Jane's feelings were still upset. He asked her if she was going with him to Apple Creek Pasture, and she answered, still tearfully, that she thought she had better stay at home with Belinda; Belinda was not feeling very well. By making really heroic effort, Anthony forced himself to suggest that Belinda might go with them. He did not like dolls "to be around" when he and Jane went out together;

but in this case he was generous enough to invite Belinda and thus make amends.

Yet even this was not enough. Jane hinted that Belinda would not care to go in company with some one who did not appreciate her. This was rather more injustice than Anthony could bear; so he left the house and set off for the hill with no other companion than Brian.

He had put his book of poetry into his pocket, although it was far too chilly a day for sitting under the apple tree to read. It was still October, yet the day might have been mid-November, so dull was the sky, so bare and dark the trees, so brown and rusty the hills. He walked through the little wood and mounted the path, wishing uncomfortably all the time that Jane had come. Brian was galloping excitedly hither and yon, sniffing the trails of rabbits and, now and then, startling some brisk, bouncing cottontail, which fled away through the sparse underbrush, more indignant than frightened. Once out on the more thickly grown hillside above the river, the rabbits, with their skilled doubling and turning, made short work of the puppy's efforts at pursuit, so that he would presently return, breathless and with hanging tongue, to follow Anthony until he caught another irresistible scent and was off again.

As Anthony came up the open slope of the pasture, a chill wind struck him, blowing across the cold waters of the wide, gray river. He turned up his collar and sought the sheltered end of the cabin, where he hoped

it might be warm enough to sit down, either to read or to watch for quail. It was less cold, under the protection of the stout log wall, a fact which had already been discovered by Roger Jarvis; for he was sitting there, with his sketch book open, making a drawing of the apple tree.

"Did n't your sister say that the tree was more of a picture, even, than the cabin?" he said, as Anthony sat down beside him. "I think she was right. I never saw a stranger, crookeder or more stately old tree."

With the stripping of the foliage, the real form of the tree had become completely visible. Anthony and Jane had loved it for its sweet yellow apples, its drooping branches, and its pale gold leaves; but the boy found it of more striking beauty now, as it stood stark and bare against the cold gray sky. Written upon its massive trunk and spreading branches was a tale of high spring winds, of summer thunderstorms, of late autumn gales, and winter tempests. The tree was gnarled and twisted almost beyond belief, as though, over and over again, some furious whirlwind had striven to uproot it, but had striven in vain. Its broad head was bowed and its longest branches all bent in one direction, as though, through many and many a winter, it had turned its shivering back to the icy blizzards.

There was quiet and peace everywhere to-day, yet it was not difficult to picture those bitter storms which had swept across the prairies or the frozen plain of the big river, which had come to do battle with that single unconquerable tree upon the hillside. Bowed and

scarred as it was, with wind-tossed branches which would never be straight again, it yet stood firmly upon its high ridge, spreading a broad shelter for birds and berries and the little creeping flowers that loved to come up to its very feet.

Year after year it had fought through the long cold months against wind and ice, frost and driving snow, always to emerge victorious every spring in triumphant glory of tender green leaves and blossoms of pink and white. In the early autumn it bore a harvest of big thin-skinned apples as yellow as honey and as sweet. Anthony and Jane had eaten them warm with the sunshine upon them, and had thought that nothing in the wide world could ever be finer. There were great numbers of rabbits, squirrels, woodchucks and birds of different sorts who thought the same.

Anthony sat down upon the dry grass beside Roger and attempted a few questions of friendly interest concerning the older boy's new life in Winstead. Where was he living? How did the new building get on? Was the foreman, Nelson, difficult to please? Did n't he like Mr. Ballantine?

He was living with Mr. Ballantine, Roger told him. There was an extra room in the little house, and as Mrs. Ballantine was often alone when her son was obliged to be away over night, they were glad to have some other person with them.

"At least, so they say," he added, "but sometimes I am sure they only have me there because they are kind. I have seen one or two of the boarding houses,

of the sort I would have to live in, for what Mr. Ballantine is to pay me, and I am thankful enough for my good luck. Mrs. Ballantine is a dear little old lady, always cooking good things for us and always talking about her son."

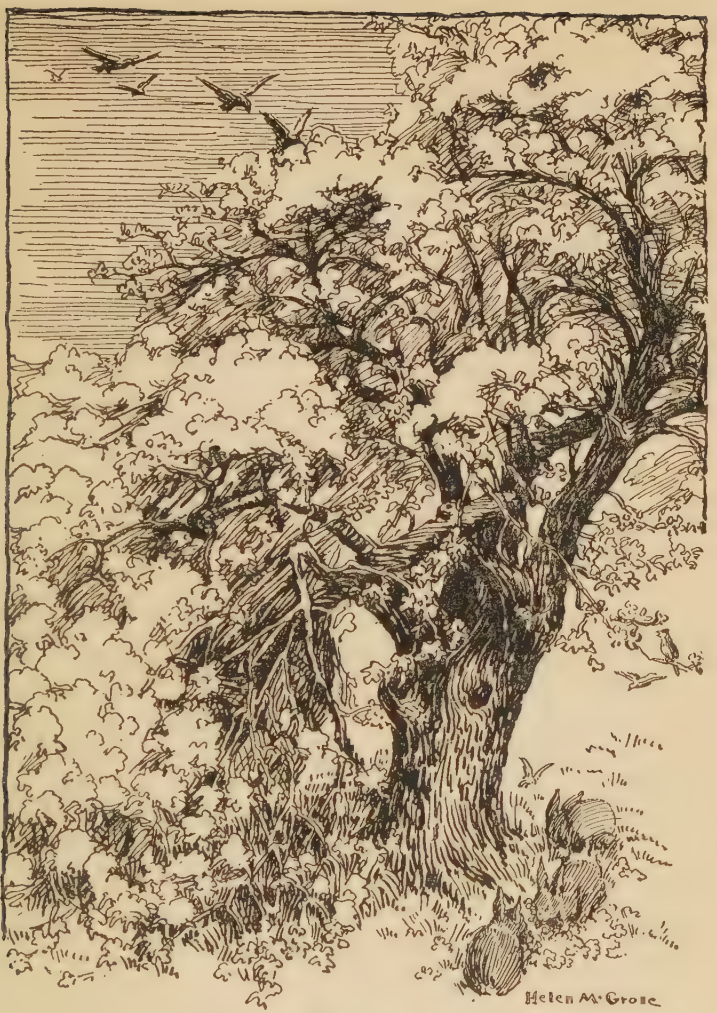
The building was getting along well; Nelson was good to him, but expected the best that was in anybody, and never passed over a mistake. There was one man, whose work was usually close by Roger's, a big, overbearing fellow, who was always trying to get him into trouble. He knew how to make things hard for a new workman, and he was doing it.

"I don't know how it will end," said Roger darkly.

As for his liking Mr. Ballantine, well, there simply was n't time to answer that question. Mr. Ballantine was just about the finest man he had ever met.

"I had thought at first," — he began, but interrupted himself.

Anthony, from where he sat, could look past the corner of the cabin, at the dull surface of the river, which to-day held no hint of blue. Through the bare woods, sounds came up the hill more clearly than when the intervening space was covered with rustling green. He had never before been quite so conscious that there was a road far below, at the river's edge, a highway which hugged the hillside so closely that it was quite invisible from above. He rather resented the occasional "honk, honk" from a speeding automobile on the Apple Creek Road, and was glad that the sound was so faint.



Year after year it had fought through the long cold months, to emerge victorious every spring.

As they talked, he had been digging idly with a bit of stick into a patch of bare ground close to his hand. He hardly noticed the abruptness with which Roger had paused; for the stick had struck something hard, and he was absorbed in getting the object free of earth. It was small, oblong in shape, and pointed at one end. He rubbed it clean upon the grass and showed it to Roger, lying in the palm of his hand.

It was an arrowhead, not a perfect one, but flawed, so that the two sides were not quite even. Nagushah, the Indian friend of Abner Hood, had sat here working, had cast it aside as imperfect, and had gone on to fashion others. On just such a chilly day, he, with Abner or Joel Davidson or perhaps with Laughing Pierre, had sought the warm, sheltered end of the cabin and they had talked there together, just as he and Roger had been talking. Nothing could have brought the truth of Mr. Ballantine's tale more vividly home to him than the sight of the smooth, flint arrowhead hidden so long beneath the grass.

What had they talked of there together? Perhaps Nagushah and the boy had held long converse as the Indian worked and, possibly, as Joel helped him. They must have discussed Indian raids, the growing stream of emigrants passing into the far West, the flocks of wild ducks and geese and swans going by overhead. Matthew Ballantine had told Anthony that the swans they had seen were creatures of settled habit and that, as long as he could remember, migrating flights of the great white birds had always stopped to rest on that

same bar. Probably the Indian and the boy had seen just such silver-winged flocks come circling out of the sky, to settle for a little time on the willow-grown island at the mouth of Apple Creek. It brought the two very near; made the time that had passed seem very short.

Roger had fallen into a reverie also, but he did not speak his thoughts. He had completed the sketch and now sat, with his pencil idle in his fingers, glancing from the tree to the page. Anthony moved closer to look, and exclaimed with pleasure. The artist had caught the likeness of the tree as he might have caught that of a person. The picture was ably and skillfully drawn, a beautiful piece of work.

"I wish Jane could see that," exclaimed Anthony. "She loves the tree so much. We both do."

"I will finish it, some time, with pen and ink. When I have made a real drawing of it, you and she shall have it," Roger promised.

Anthony thanked him with enthusiasm.

"Do you think you are going to stay in Winstead long?" he presently inquired, because he could think of nothing further to say.

Roger did not answer, but got up abruptly. "It is time for me to go," he said.

Anthony felt that he had driven his companion away by his questions, and felt miserable and clumsy. He had meant to show friendliness and interest to some one who seemed mysteriously alone. Yet he seemed only to have succeeded in making the strange boy

shyer and more uneasy. He got up also, stammering, "I did n't mean —"

He pulled out his watch and stood looking at its broad face. It was a gesture in which he often indulged when he was troubled, and it was always, somehow, comforting to him. He made another effort, "I did n't mean ——"

A loud, terrified clamor from Brian broke in upon his attempted apology. Mingled with the frantic yelping of the puppy was a strange, ominous sound, a deep-voiced grumbling which rose now and again to an angry bellow. Running out from the shelter of the cabin, Anthony saw on the slope below a young bull, a lusty, black-and-white beast, with lowered horns and lashing tail, facing Brian, and lunging at him in blind fury.

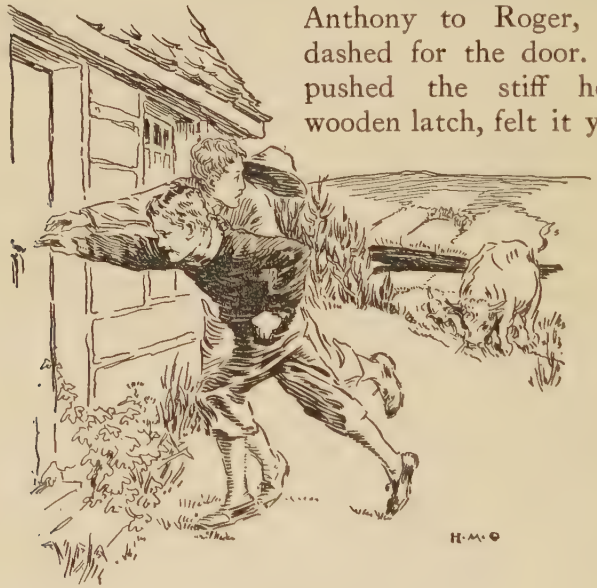
To the comfortable old red cow which had, so far, been the only one of her kind grazing in the pasture, had been added this new and unfriendly creature. He had been grazing on the other side of the hill, unconscious of the boys beside the cabin, but had been discovered by the inquisitive Brian, who, not knowing what to make of him, had barked and jumped and dodged about him, until the short-tempered animal was thoroughly enraged. The dog, now beside himself with fright, knew no better than to continue his wild leaping and yelping, as he fell back before the angry beast.

"Brian, here; come here," shouted Anthony.

The dog heard the familiar voice and heeded, even in spite of his frenzy of excitement. But, unfortunately, the bull heard also. Exasperated at being

unable to touch the dog, he turned his heavy stupid rage against the two boys. In a furious rush he came charging up the hill, with Brian still snarling and yapping at his heels.

There was no cover near; no fence behind which to take refuge. Even the apple tree was out of reach. "The cabin," shouted Anthony to Roger, and dashed for the door. He pushed the stiff heavy wooden latch, felt it yield,



and tumbled over the threshold, with Roger beside him. Together they slammed the heavy door almost in the face of their assailant, whose plunging charge was checked by his stumbling over the door-stone.

The big beast whirled about and made a vicious

thrust at Brian, who dodged and, in his turn, made a snapping plunge at the other's heels. They spun about as though they were on the rim of a pinwheel, the big black-and-white animal mad with rage, the panting red-coated dog equally mad with excitement. Snorts, bellowings, yelps and dust filled the air about them, as Brian raced round and round, trying to bite the stamping heels, while the bull swung about before him, trying to catch the leaping dog upon his horns. Anthony half-opened the door and shouted a command at a fortunately right moment. Brian shot inside and dropped gasping upon the floor, while the enemy, thwarted once more by the slamming door, stamped and raged without.

Anthony, standing with his back against the door, addressed the dog in reproachful tones.

"Brian," he said seriously, "I don't think you know very much."

Brian drooped his ears and swept his tail apologetically back and forth upon the dusty floor. How could a puppy, born in a well-ordered kennel, know anything of the strange creatures that roamed the world at large? Several Saturdays ago he had dug out of its comfortable sleeping place on the brushy hillside a plump black-and-white animal, who refused to run away from him. Brian had escaped from that encounter with rather less damage than might have been expected; and, being an active-witted dog, he had learned about skunks and how to leave them alone. Now he had learned the same thing about bulls.

"I suppose we will have to wait here until that fellow cools off, or goes home to supper," remarked Roger, who was taking an observation from the windows.

The bull was still pawing and tearing the ground, talking to himself in the grumbling undertone which they had first heard. He had a watchful rolling eye turned upon the door of the cabin, and, even after his hot rage had simmered down, and he had fallen to snatching mouthfuls of dry grass under the apple tree, he was still listening and looking continually for any reappearance of the routed enemy. It was quite clear that the three in the little house, Anthony, Roger and Brian Boru, were to be imprisoned until he chose to let them go.

The interior of the cabin contained nothing but a battered bench and a thick layer of dust everywhere. Even the fireplace had been swept clean of ashes by winds roaring down the big chimney; although the rough iron andirons were still there, and the black mark of the fire showed upon the stones of the hearth. Here Abner Hood and Joel Davidson had toiled and watched, had shivered and starved, and by long and patient courage had come to success and prosperity at last. Nothing was left as record of their long struggle in that place, save for the mark of the fire and the initials J. D. roughly carved on the end of the bench. The outer walls were so thick that the interior space was very narrow. The central apartment was small, and the little rooms at each end were tiny. One of them held two narrow bunks, while the other, provided with

shelves and hooks, had probably been a storehouse for furs, ammunition and provisions. How lean had been the supplies stored there during that first winter; how slight the barrier between those two and starvation! How their hearts must have sunk, on some mornings, when they awoke to ever deeper snow and ever more cruel cold, when they looked at their steadily dwindling stores within and saw no signs of spring without, nothing but the tracks of wild creatures coming boldly up to their very door!

Anthony was thinking of all these things as he moved about from one end of the cabin to the other. He and Jane had tried the door one day, had found it was not locked and had peeped in, but had not entered, since they did not then know to whom the place might belong.

"That first winter must have seemed longer than all the other years they spent here," said Roger. He was evidently thinking, as was Anthony, of the two who had once dwelt in that place.

They pulled the bench to the widest window and sat down together to watch the bull, the broad river and the bare branches of the apple tree stirring in the chill wind. Across the gray sky a thin line of belated ducks was traveling hastily southward. It was warm in the cabin, with the accumulated warmth of a whole summer of sunshine on the walls and low spreading roof. The chill of autumn had not yet pierced those big logs and the heavy hand-split cedar shingles.

It was very quiet for a time. Anthony made no further attempt at talk. His friendly questions seemed to

have made Roger uncomfortable, so now he would ask no more. But the older boy presently broke the silence by asking questions of his own, about Jane, about Nora, about the house in which they lived. Presently he came to the inquiry at which he had evidently been aiming from the beginning.

"Did n't my father come to see you?"

"Yes," Anthony told him. "He wanted to know if you were here and safe."

"Did — did you tell him much about seeing me on the hill?" Roger asked, with hesitation.

"No," returned Anthony promptly. The secret of Roger's weariness and hunger was one that another boy would know how to keep. There was nothing said for a few more minutes, and then Roger broke forth:

"I may as well tell you why I came here, and how I came — that way. I would like to tell you."

Stiffness and reserve do not last long when two people are imprisoned together in a small space with no escape. And especially, when one of these two was as simple and friendly a person as Anthony, shy acquaintance gave place very quickly to eager understanding.

"You know my father a little," Roger began, "but not enough to see just what kind of a person he is."

Anthony thought that he understood quite well what sort of person Jonathan Jarvis was; but he made no comment, and Roger went on. He described the life that he and his father led together, a combination of two people who had entirely different tastes and feelings, but who loved each other. Like Anthony

and Jane, Roger had no mother, so that he and his father were especially cast upon each other's company.

"I did n't see so much of him when I was little," he said, "but in the last few years he has had me with him more and more, talking to me about his business, telling me of the plans he has, and which ones he wants most to succeed. He — he does not have many friends, — fewer and fewer as time goes on. I can't help seeing that."

He drew a long breath and continued bravely. He knew that his father was hard, that Jonathan Jarvis seldom allowed himself to think either of his own feelings or those of other people. To do so was to interfere with success, he always said.

"And success is the one thing he thinks about and wants," his son tried to make clear. "It is not just making money; it is having power, overcoming things that stand in his way, having people say about him — 'There is a man who has got on in the world.'"

It was hard for Roger to make it plain, yet Anthony caught his meaning, caught the picture of a Jonathan Jarvis who could not gain the love of his fellow men and so wanted their admiration, wanted it at almost any cost.

"He has talked to me a little about your affairs," Roger said. "At the very beginning, some of your money was lost, although it was through some investment that your father wanted; it was not my father's mistake alone. And now he wants that loss to be made up; he wants to have you use as little income as pos-

sible, so that he can put your money into other things and in the end get you more than you had at first. He wants you to say, some time, what a wonderful manager he was, and how well and cleverly he took care of your affairs."

"But has he any right to choose for us?" Anthony burst out. The knowledge of what Jonathan Jarvis was planning for him and Jane was still a cold terror in his heart. "Does n't he think at all of how we feel, or how Nora feels? Nora has done everything in the world for us: but he would —" He stopped. He was forgetting that he was talking to Jonathan Jarvis' son.

Roger reddened.

"I know," he said, "I have heard him talk about that — that plan." Like Anthony, he did not seem able to put into words the desperate project of taking those two away from the one person who loved them, of sending them to lead separated lives among distant and money-loving strangers. "I never liked it even when he first spoke of it and when I did n't know you. Now I have seen you and Jane and Nora — I feel the way you do, Anthony."

"My father and I think differently about a great many things," Roger continued. The course of explanation was growing more and more difficult. "We got on well just the same until — until just lately, when there were matters that were too big to pass over. My father is hot-tempered; he gets excited and angry sometimes when things don't go his way. He wants every one to see his affairs just as he sees them. I am

not criticizing him, Anthony; I want you to understand him as I do."

He looked at the younger boy with an expression in his eyes which Anthony had seen before. It had been in the eyes of little Mr. Thrale when he talked of Newton; it was a look which said — "Don't judge too harshly the person whom I love, in spite of his faults."

"It 's all right," he said to Roger; "I am trying to understand. Go on."

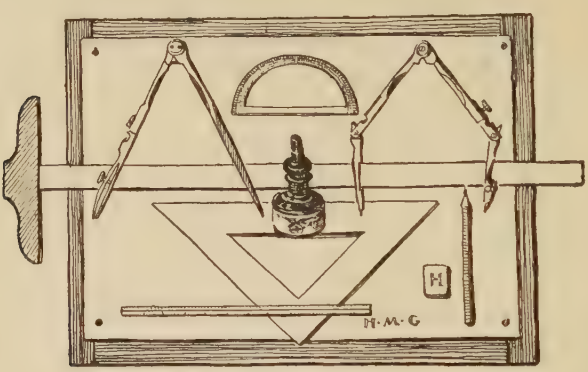
"We used to argue about you and Jane," Roger said, "and it troubled me desperately to see how determined he was to do as he had planned for you. And then something else came up, something bigger yet, so it seemed to me then. And over that we — broke."

Anthony waited. He remembered the look on Roger's face that day he came over the hill, a look which was not born of hunger and weariness, although both were there. He was to understand it now.

"My father wanted me to leave college and to go into business with him. It was to be my third year, and no one knows how I wanted to go on. I intended to finish, and to study architecture afterward. You know, when a person wants to do just one thing, how much he wants it.

"My father was against that. He wanted the other thing so much that I had to give in. I thought that perhaps when I got money enough of my own I could study to be an architect. Anyway, I agreed, and he began to let me more and more into his affairs and tell me about his business from the beginning."

There was a long pause now. Here was the most difficult thing of all to tell.



"Did you know that my father lived in Winstead long ago, and that he and Mr. Ballantine were partners?"

"I did n't know about their partnership," Anthony exclaimed in surprise. Such a fact gave some explanation for that meeting on last Sunday morning, for that sudden reddening of Jonathan Jarvis' face and for the easy amused smile of Matthew Ballantine. Roger, with some halting for words, yet with unwavering determination, gave Anthony an account of events which made quite clear why those two men had met, yet had not spoken to each other.

Jonathan Jarvis was the younger, it seemed, and had, in the beginning, been employed by Matthew Ballantine when he had first begun to have need of a clerk. The two were neither of them "much older than I am now,"

Roger said. Matthew Ballantine had begun to work when he was very young, and, at the time Jonathan Jarvis joined him, had already set up a fairly profitable business with his lumberyard and small sawmill, and had even gathered a little capital. The two worked well together; Jonathan Jarvis was taken into partnership very soon after and the enterprise prospered.

An opportunity finally came to them, brought about through a friend of Matthew Ballantine's. It was a chance to buy and sell again a large quantity of lumber and timberlands, an opening for generous profit, if the matter were well managed.

"They talked it over," Roger said, "and decided that my father was the one to go up into the next State, meet the men who wanted to sell, and see that the thing went through properly. Matthew Ballantine said it was more in my father's line than his own."

"And did your father succeed?" Anthony asked.

"He did. He succeeded so well, that he went forward from there, and never looked back. He dissolved partnership with Mr. Ballantine, and went on for himself, and prospered more and more. It was Matthew Ballantine's chance; but my father took it."

"But — but —" stammered Anthony. "How could he?"

"You must n't misjudge my father," said Roger quickly. "I know that he thought that what he did was right; he still thinks so. When he told me about it, he did not have a single doubt but that he had followed the right way, the way all men must go if they are to

succeed. He said he could not be tied to a man who was never going to rise in the world."

"And what did Mr. Ballantine say when your father left him?" Anthony asked.

"He said almost nothing for a long time. My father paid back the money which had helped him to that first success: he did not pay him any of the profits which had come from it; he thought those were his own."

Matthew Ballantine had waited for a whole year to be sure that Jonathan Jarvis was really determined to go on in the course he had taken. Then he journeyed to the city where the other now lived, sought him out in his office, and told him what he thought of him. That was the last time that they had spoken together.

"My father tried to make light of it when he told me of that meeting; for he even repeated to me a great deal of what Mr. Ballantine had said, how he had told him that this was the wrong way to choose, that he was never going to be really successful or really happy after a beginning like that. I think it was a great relief to my father to speak of the affair after all these years. Some of the things that Mr. Ballantine said seemed to have cut very deep. My father wanted, at last, to have some one know about it, and feel as he did, that this Matthew Ballantine was unjust and wrong."

"And did you think so?" Anthony asked.

Roger Jarvis drew a great breath.

"No," he said with such emphasis that both Anthony and Brian jumped.

"We talked and talked, argued and argued," the older boy finally continued more calmly, "but I could not see it Dad's way, no matter what he said. I had never known Matthew Ballantine, and I had always thought everything of my father. But, somehow, I simply could not believe that what he had done was right. Heaven knows I tried to, Anthony. It is a terrible thing to believe that some one you — you care about has done what is wrong."

He did not try to speak for some minutes, during which Anthony's thoughts traveled far away. There were all sorts of fathers and all sorts of sons, he was reflecting: little Mr. Thrale, good and clever and kind, who loved his big son Newton and was despised by him; earnest and honest Roger, who loved his father, and yet must see that he had not kept faith with his honor. It came to the boy suddenly that he was richer than these two, with his radiant memory of a father who was gone. Even though that memory was attended by the aching knowledge of great loss, it was a finer possession than these others had. In these flashes of remembrance which remained to him, there was one recollection of a long winter afternoon spent with his father before the library fire, when they talked together as only father and son can talk, of great things and great thoughts. Anthony was only a little boy; yet sometimes his father had talked to him as though his son were his own age, sometimes had talked as though he himself were of no greater years than Anthony. It was a memory which he was never to

lose; and it was something which Roger Jarvis could never know.

"And — and what happened afterward?" he asked finally, since Roger seemed unable to go on without help.

"My father was angry, more angry than I had ever seen him. 'Did I think more of Matthew Ballantine, a humdrum fellow in a dull little town, a person whom I had never seen, than I did of my own father?' he kept asking. But I could n't give way — I could n't. At last he said to me:

"'Then go to Matthew Ballantine, go to him with your precious doubts and scruples, and see what he thinks of the matter now. Long since, he must have admitted to himself that I did right, that it is so that every one must do who is to go up in the world. He has just the sort of obstinate honesty that will make him tell you the truth. He will laugh at you for a fool, a blind fool. He must often have cursed himself for being the same.'"

The elder Jarvis had flung out of the room at this, and had left his son to reflect upon the affair alone. Next day he would neither see Roger nor speak to him. Jonathan Jarvis was a man of obstinate temper; and anger had thoroughly taken possession of him. It was plain that there would be no peace between them until one or the other had given way; and that, neither of the two could do.

Roger had never felt more utterly alone, as he struggled with the problem of what he should do.

There was no person to whom he could turn, no one of whom he could ask counsel. More and more he thought that he, so nearly grown as he felt himself to be, had no right to live in Jonathan Jarvis' house, when he and his father were at such terrible odds over a matter upon which rested their whole welfare. In the end, his decision was to do as his father had so bitterly suggested, to go to Matthew Ballantine, to hear his version of the affair and to decide, through his means, whether the whole difficulty were being magnified or not.

He set out forthwith, not sufficiently supplied with money for the journey, yet far too proud to ask for more. He managed to get within twenty miles of Winstead before his funds came to an end; he walked the rest of the way, with occasional lifts from friendly motorists. And so he had come over the hill from Apple Creek, weary from his wayfaring, having eaten nothing since noon of the day before, and worn from the unhappy struggle which was still going on within himself.

"I knew I could not go another five miles, and yet I dreaded coming to the end," he told Anthony. "I wanted to know what Matthew Ballantine would say of my father; and I was afraid to hear it."

And when Matthew Ballantine learned who Roger was, his first words, as Anthony could well remember, gave no hope that he had come to think other than bitterly of Jonathan Jarvis and all that belonged to him.

"I felt as though I never could go in," declared Roger, "but I had come so far, and somehow I had to go through with the thing to the end."

"And what did he do? What did he say to you?" Anthony demanded eagerly.

Both of them had long since forgotten the bull outside; Roger's shyness had vanished. A slow smile of deep and delighted meaning now spread over his intent face.

"There never was a man like Mr. Ballantine, never in all the world before," he vowed solemnly.

The interview had been indeed a difficult one at the beginning. Matthew Ballantine had sat down by the desk under the green lamp, with Roger, white-faced and silent, standing before him.

"Well," the older man had said, and after a pause had repeated sharply — "Well." It was plain that he was giving no help to a Jarvis. Roger thought that not even his father had ever looked so hard or so determinedly unmoved.

With a desperate effort Roger got out the first words, "My father tells me —"

He went on fairly steadily, for a few sentences, then became confused and incoherent. He was trying to tell of how he had doubted his father, yet how he loved him and must stand by him just the same. At last he stopped for very want of words that should make such a difficult thing clear.

Lame and inadequate as had been his explanation, he had managed to give at least some hint of how great

was his trouble. Mr. Ballantine leaned forward on the desk, his expression changing suddenly.

"Go on, boy," he said. "Let 's have it all. And don't worry, we will find a way out."

His face fairly glowed under the lamplight, with the warmth of that encouraging smile.

After that nothing was hard. He seemed to comprehend what Roger was trying to say, almost before he attempted to say it. His complete understanding of Jonathan Jarvis; his unstinted generosity and kindliness to Jonathan Jarvis' son, were what made the explanation easy. He heard the whole history of the boy's disagreement with his father, and then leaned back in his chair, thinking deeply.

"Your father guessed right when he said that I would tell you what I truly thought," he said at last. "If I had come to believe as he would have me, I would surely tell you so, and would bear no grudge, but would give you the truth. But I have never changed my mind on that score; I never will. Jonathan Jarvis did wrong, wrong to me, wrong to himself, wrong to you. He has prospered greatly and I have prospered only a little; therefore he thinks his way was best. He will live to see that he is mistaken. We will not judge him, you and I. All men make mistakes, and he has made so great a one that he will be bound to suffer from it, some day."

A great weight fell from Roger's spirit, as he heard his new friend's counsel. It was not so heart-breaking a matter, after all, seen through this man's eyes; he

could be comforted and look about him at a brighter world again. At this moment Mrs. Ballantine came in, a frail, dainty little old lady "like the portrait of somebody's great-grandmother," as Roger described her to Anthony. On the young stranger's being introduced to her, she exclaimed at once:

"Bless us, I 'll be bound the boy has had no supper."

That supper — in the cozy dining room of the Ballantine cottage, with the yellow-flowered curtains drawn, with orange lamplight on blue china, with "every good thing in the world, almost", spread out before him — it was something to dream about for years after. His body was now fed in comfort and peace, just as his heart had been fed on understanding and kindness in the last hour. When the meal at last was over, and Mrs. Ballantine in her thin silvery little voice had asked a blessing, her big son had got up from the table and had asked:

"And now, my young friend, what do you think of doing next?"

That question was a difficult one indeed. Beyond finding Matthew Ballantine and seeking some ease for his heavy trouble, Roger had made no plan. Could he go back to his father? At that very moment Jonathan Jarvis was within a quarter of a mile of his son; but to Nora's query as to whether he wanted to see Roger, his answer was to be that hard "No." The boy could not know this; but he felt, just the same, that happiness and agreement between them was, for the

time being, at an end. He was spent and penniless and he had no notion of where he should go.

"Would you like to work for me?" Matthew Ballantine had offered, and, after a little reluctance, lest the offer be made out of pure kindness, Roger had agreed. Mr. Ballantine assured him that he had no high place to give him, only "the job of carpenter's helper, and we are always looking for men for that." So the next day, in brand-new overalls, as conspicuously untried as himself, Roger set out upon a new phase of life.

He had made plain the whole of the situation to Anthony, and now, haltingly, told him something more. In his heart there had been some idea of making amends to Matthew Ballantine, some vague thought that he might take the place out of which Jonathan Jarvis had stepped so abruptly, a great many years ago.

"But I thought too much of myself," Roger confessed; "after the first day, I knew I was a bungling greenhorn, and that only a kind employer would keep me on until I learned to be of real use. I 'm not worth what he pays me; but he says every one has to begin somewhere, and it is worth his while to have me taught. There is that big bully of a John Wythe who always tells me what a clumsy fool I am, no matter how well I know it myself."

"But," remonstrated Anthony, "you wanted to go back to college, to study to be an architect."

A cloud passed over the other's face.

"Yes, and I don't see any chance of that now. But

I will see this through. I am bound to learn to be of use to him some day, to pay back the help he has given me. I might — I might, in a long time, make up to him a little of what he lost through my father."

He got up, walked to the far window, and stood looking out.

"Perhaps it was over there, across that ridge," he said abruptly, "that Abner Hood used to hammer down his boundary stakes, when he felt his courage going."

Anthony knew well of what he was thinking, of that struggle which another had fought to an end in that narrow place. His memory echoed the words of Abner Hood which Mr. Ballantine had repeated — "What long labor it takes to make a wrong thing right!"

He stood up, in his turn, to look out. The bull had grazed slowly across the hillside and was now out of sight beyond the ridge. As he craned his neck in an attempt to catch sight of the departed enemy, a sudden horrifying thought seized him.

"Oh," he cried, "Jane!"

"What is it?" questioned Roger, wheeling about.

"Nora said that Jane might come up the hill later — and with that bull in the pasture —"

He flung open the door and ran out. There was no sign of either Jane or the bull. He mounted to the top of the ridge for a better view and saw, first that the gray clouds had broken near the horizon, letting through a flood of red-gold sunshine. He rubbed his eyes, a little dazzled by the sudden radiance, and was

presently aware of the bull, so recently a stamping, snorting picture of rage, now as meek and quiet as the kind old bossy who had formerly been the sole inhabitant of the pasture. The animal was being led down the farther slope by a little, gray-haired man, bent from long stooping over the plough, sunburned almost to the color of the brown earth itself. This, so Anthony knew, was Mark Lyman, evidently owner of the hot-headed beast, whom he was conducting homeward by means of the ring in its nose.

"Who 's been gettin' my best Holstein critter all het up?" the farmer called across to them. A roll of deep laughter followed the question. He jerked his head toward the hillside sloping down to Apple Creek. "*She's* there, waitin' at the bars," he added. "Without her, you would 'a' stayed up yonder all night, like as not. And Ballantine's with her; brought her over to see about the bull."

He disappeared over the ridge, going down the hill toward his farm beyond the creek. A moment later Jane appeared from the same direction, Jane in a scarlet sweater and with blowing hair, quite calm and comforted. She was carrying Belinda of the sensitive feelings beneath her arm. As she saw her brother she quickened her pace, while he ran down to meet her.

"Oh, I am so sorry, Anthony. Look, quick at the sun. Say you know I am sorry."

Any one who was not acquainted with Jane might have been mystified by this speech; but Anthony comprehended.

"Yes," he said, "it 's all right; I am so sorry too. I never should have laughed at Belinda; I never will again."

The sun, about which Jane had been so anxious lest it go down upon her wrath, came out in full blaze of crimson glory and slipped behind the ridge. Belinda, apparently quite appeased, hung over her mistress' arm and, with her one eye, regarded Anthony without reproach.

"I came up through the wood to say I was sorry," Jane explained, "and I saw the big spotty cow before I passed the fence; I heard him a long way off, stamping and rumbling inside. I saw your face at a window and guessed that he had driven you into the cabin. So I went back and told Mr. Ballantine, and he took me in his car, around by the road, to tell Mark Lyman. And so he came up and got his bull. It 's named Charlemagne Augustus; that 's a fancy name he has to have to take prizes with. But they call him 'Gus' for short, and he won't obey any one but Mark Lyman."

"I suppose we can't come here again," said Anthony regretfully; but Jane reassured him.

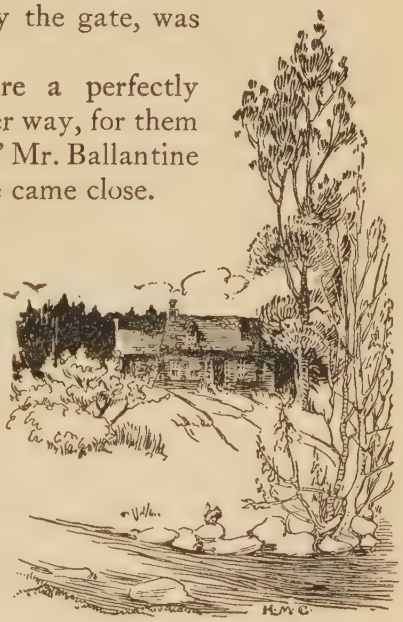
"They 're going to put the bull into another pasture. Last Saturday Mr. Ballantine was going over the hill to talk to Mark Lyman about doing it, but he stopped and stayed with us instead. He says usually Gus is n't turned into this field until the first of November, so he thought there was plenty of time to arrange it still. Mark Lyman said he would just put his kind

cows in Apple Creek Pasture and we could come here as often as we liked."

Roger came out of the cabin to join them; and with them he walked down the hill toward Apple Creek, so that they might thank Mr. Ballantine for organizing the rescue party. They crossed the stream by the rough log bridge over which Charlemagne Augustus had been led before them. He was now safely lodged in his own farmyard, and Matthew Ballantine, standing by the gate, was talking to his owner.

"And is the pasture a perfectly safe place, in every other way, for them to come on Saturdays?" Mr. Ballantine was saying as the three came close.

"Sure," answered Mark Lyman. "All the rough characters travels by motor car these days, and you won't find undesirables stopping to climb that steep hill. The whole place is in view of my farm, and almost in call of the town. Yes, they're as safe there as in their own garden."



From where they were standing at the edge of the farmyard, they could see a path which led down toward

Apple Creek. Plainly within sight stood the tumble-down cottage in the elbow of the stream, the small house which was also visible from the hill above. At this near view it looked more battered and disreputable than ever. The doors were still closed and the windows blank, with no smoke in the chimney. Matthew Ballantine, who was looking along the path at the house, still appeared doubtful and not quite satisfied.

"Oh, you mean *him?*" Mark Lyman jerked his head sideways to indicate the hovel by the stream. "If it 's Jerry Gibbs that 's on your mind, you need n't trouble. He 's off on one of his long jaunts, like he always is in summer, wandering Heaven knows where and a good riddance."

"How long will he be gone?" asked Matthew Ballantine.

"He 's been gone for months now; maybe he won't ever come back. Every year I hope we 've seen the last of him and his great ugly dog. One of them steals my corn and the other gets my hens, and they 're so smart I never can catch them at it. I 've tried, a hundred times, to buy him out; but he hangs on to that little point of land that he got from his father, and won't sell for any consideration."

"He is a bad neighbor," observed Mr. Ballantine.

"He is just that. They say he 's part Indian — that 's what makes him such a wanderer — and part Scotch — that 's what make him hold on to what he owns. But there 's only a little of those two in him and the rest is all rascal."

"Well," said Mr. Ballantine, "just let us know when he comes home. Perhaps, as you say, this time he is gone for good. The sheriff has told him not to come into town, so I should think he might leave these parts altogether some day."

"I sure wish he would," Mark Lyman said with feeling.

Anthony looked down curiously at the little deserted house by the stream. It was certainly an unlovely place, he thought, and straightway forgot it and the talk concerning its owner.

The farmer went into his big barn, and the three, with Matthew Ballantine, walked down the narrow lane to where the car waited in the road. Jane had observed that Roger and Anthony were chatting on such familiar terms that some change must have come about during that sojourn in the cabin. Her brother was talking to Mr. Ballantine, so that she and Roger were following together. Seeing him admitted into Anthony's friendship, she straightway took him into her own.

"I will tell you now," she offered with her readiest and most trusting smile, "what it was I was thinking about you, that afternoon you came up the hill — that is, if you still want to know and you won't laugh at me."

"Indeed I do want to know," returned Roger, "and I would never laugh at you."

"Anthony and I have been wishing that we could give Nora a house, a little cozy house where we could all live together forever and forever. And I was wish-

ing on the three crows — I was wishing that you were bringing us that house, like the stranger in the Grimm fairy tales; that you had it in that pack on your shoulders, little, you know, but magic, so that it could grow big when you took it out and set it on that flat ground just beyond the apple tree."

She regarded him anxiously, lest he break his promise and make game of her, after all.

But Roger's smile was not laughter; it was complete understanding of her idea.

"Do you know," he said earnestly, "perhaps that might be true!"

CHAPTER VI

THE GOLDEN YEAR

JANE had spent as much thought as had Anthony upon the plan of providing a house for Nora. Although she was quite happily unconscious of the danger that hung over them, she was vaguely aware that some cloud had settled down upon the household ever since Mr. Jarvis' visit. She made no attempt to understand what was wrong; but merely increased somewhat her distrust of that gentleman who was called their guardian.

Anthony disliked the house in which they lived, for its general gloom, its narrow halls and the ugly awkward proportions of its outside. Jane, while she could not put her criticisms into words, felt its drawbacks even further. She could feel that the man for whom it had been built had thought nothing of sunshine, or comfort, or the health and strength of those women who must care for the place in all the years to come.

Both Anthony and Jane helped with the daily tasks; where there was so much labor they would have been ashamed to do otherwise. But no one could make easy for Nora the scrubbing of the uneven floors, the endless toiling up and down the long stairs, the constant struggle against dirt which sifted in through ill-fitting windows and hid itself in dark, inaccessible corners. Even to their eyes, not very observant in such

matters, it was plain that Nora was growing thin and weary. Anthony knew what anxiety was wearing upon her in addition to her daily round of work; but both of them could see that she was not the same Nora of a few months ago. She was still always cheerful, joked with them, understood them and cared for them as untiringly as ever. She accomplished miracles in the way of making them comfortable; she made their round of life and their simple meals not only wholesome and varied, but also gay.

"You feed us on the fat of the land," Anthony would say to her; for his healthy appetite appreciated the excellence of her cooking.

"I congratulate you on your good taste," she would answer. "There is not many that have such good judgment as to see the fat of the land in Irish stew."

"You wave a fairy wand over the turnips and make them into apple pie," Jane declared, but Nora admitted that this was not quite true.

"A fairy wand must have some power behind it, to make apples in the tarts turn into turnips on the grocery bill," she said.

They all understood completely that they were very poor, and that there must be contriving of every kind to make things go as far as possible. Jane and Anthony occasionally felt overburdened and impatient with the constant pressure of economy, as was only natural. But they learned to withold their complaints, knowing their poverty bore harder upon Nora than upon themselves.

"We can't get away from it, because it is ours," Anthony told himself wisely. "But she does n't have to bear it; she could go somewhere else." And he would add in horror, "Suppose she should!"

The sense of loneliness, of having no one in the world to whom they belonged would have been intolerable, had it not been for their absolute confidence in Nora and in her never leaving them. Her devotion was unfailing and was great enough to make amends for all other things that were lacking.

When they felt baffled and helpless over Nora's growing evidence of overwork, Jane and Anthony would take refuge in plans for the new house that "some day" they were going to build for Nora.

"It will be little and white with — a green roof or a red one, Anthony?"

"Green, I think. Yes it will be little, but the rooms will be big, with lots of windows."

"With sunshine coming into every one of them! And the kitchen will be just not too big nor too small."

"And it will have a place for every single thing just as Nora likes it. And the house will be warm in winter and cool in summer." Their present residence showed every sign of being the exact opposite as to heat and cold.

"There will be plenty of open fires, Anthony. And Nora's room will be the best and biggest in the house, with the most sun and the most space and the finest view over the river!"

Somehow their discussions always seemed to take for

granted the idea that this palace of their dreams was to be built upon high ground overlooking the river; in short, that the site was to be Apple Creek Hill. And always they came back to the final declaration that no house would be good enough for Nora unless it had a gold chimney.

One afternoon, some three weeks after the encounter with Charlemagne Augustus, Jane made up her mind to accomplish one step, at least, toward the great achievement. School was over for the day; Anthony was occupied with some affair that had to do only with boys; and Nora was busy ironing in the dark basement laundry. Jane put on her best hat, reserved only for Sundays and great events, and got out a clean handkerchief, also the mark of a ceremonious occasion. She called to Nora that she "was going to Mr. Ballantine's" and set out.

Mr. Thrale was busy in his garden and would have been glad to stop and talk to her, since he so evidently preferred stopping to working. To-day, however, she would not suffer him to delay her; she explained that she was bound on an important errand, and continued on her way. It was a mild sunny day, one of those that, although they come in November, feel more like spring than like autumn. Somewhere from down another street came the music of a hand organ, a sound which also suggested spring. Hurdy-gurdies always seemed to belong to the season of newly opened windows, of rugs being beaten and winter clothes hung out to air. This was a belated one, giving forth a last and desperate

burst of music before the long silence of winter must begin.

Jane was in some anxiety lest Matthew Ballantine be out; but as she came down Jefferson Street, she could see from afar that fat Methuselah lay sunning himself on the step of the shop and was assured that Mr. Ballantine was to be found within.

As she stepped over the old, white bulldog, who did not move for her coming, she was not certain whether one knocked or went directly in, and solved the puzzle by first knocking so timidly that no one could have heard her, and then pushing the door open and peeping inside. She had heard a voice within singing, and she was therefore certain that their good friend must be alone.

Mr. Ballantine had managed to give to his shop a pleasant and an unusual aspect. It was like no other place of business in the world. As to size, it was extraordinarily small, the whole of the space being taken by a big desk at one end of the narrow room and a long drawing table at the other. There was a chimney against the middle of the wall, with a crackling fire burning in the small, square fireplace between big black andirons which Matthew Ballantine had forged himself. On each side of the chimney were bookshelves reaching all the way up to the ceiling, shelves that were not merely filled, but crammed with books. Mrs. Ballantine often shook her head over those overflowing bookcases, for there were volumes of houseplans, great ponderous works on architecture, catalogues of lumber,

machines and plumbing, and a vast quantity of big books and little books which had nothing to do with the building and lumber business, but which surprisingly suggested that they were poetry. They jostled each other, leaned against each other, lay sideways on one another's tops, and fairly crowded each other off the shelves.

Mr. Ballantine was sitting at the desk with his back to the door. Although there was a roll of plans spread out before him, he did not seem to be working, but sat with his head resting upon his hand. He was singing to himself, singing softly, but with such a big, deep voice that, even subdued as it was, it filled the whole of the little room. The words came very clearly:

"Low down — low down —
Where the little green lanterns shine;
O, maids, I have done with ye all but one,
And she can never be mine."

Both the notes of the music and the tones of the singer were infinitely sad. Jane felt a smart of tears in her eyes as she listened. She did not know how to tell Mr. Ballantine that she was there, and stood waiting until he should notice her. The song went on:

"It was in the midst of a hot June night
With thunder dunting round,
And I saw her face by the fairy light
That beats from off the ground."

"Oh," cried out Jane with relief and delight. "Then she was magic?"

He looked round at her, and seemed not in the least surprised or troubled that she had overheard him.

"No, not precisely magic," he said.

"The song sounded so sad and so real, I thought it seemed as though you really meant it," she observed, coming over to stand by the desk. "Did — did you — was there really somebody —?"

She felt she had no right to ask questions, but the song and the still room and Mr. Ballantine's smile seemed to have brought them, somehow, into very close acquaintance.

"Not — somebody," he told her, "and not a fairy either, though very like one. Every person living has his heart's desire in life; some people's are fulfilled early, some late, some never at all."

"And yours," questioned Jane, "did n t you ever get what you wanted? Are n't you ever going to?"

He shook his head.

"I wanted to be something different from what I am," he said, "and that is a hard wish for life to grant you. I have told you that my father was a musician; and when I was young, very young, I thought I was to be one also, a great one, the sort that makes the whole world ring with his music and its applause. I went about with that dream in my heart, while I sawed and hammered, and planned and toiled, while I bought and sold, and always dreamed. Now I am still toiling, still buying and selling, putting up buildings and pulling them down, and in my heart I am dreaming still."

"And did you make that song?" Jane asked.

"Oh, no, it was made by another man, one who is really famous; but who sometimes felt, perhaps, as I have felt. The 'maid who can never be mine' is that dream I have always had. I wanted to become, some day, what I felt that I had it in me to be. No doubt I was mistaken," he ended abruptly. "No doubt I was meant for nothing larger than to hammer boards together into buildings, or to tell other people how to hammer them. It is a fine day, is n't it, though Methuselah complains, a little, that he feels coming bad weather in his bones."

Jane was not to be put off by a change of subject. "Did you never have a chance to do what you hoped for, never any chance at all?" she insisted.

"I could not let my mother suffer real want," he declared gravely. "She had a desperate struggle to keep us both, while I was a boy, and to give me even a brief amount of schooling. She was worn out and frail by the time I was old enough to help her, and it was all I could manage to keep a roof over our heads. I had to do any work that came; there was surely no living to be made for us by fiddling."

"Was it the violin you played?" Jane was determined to learn all that she could.

"Yes, the violin was the instrument of my heart; but I would try to make music on any other that ever came to my hands. My grandfather had taught me to play and I had been given my father's violin. After my grandfather died, however, I had neither time nor opportunity to learn more. First I was busy from day-

light to dark at the mere task of learning how to make a bare living. Then, when some years had passed, and I had begun to prosper a little, there was — a brief difficulty that swept away what I had accumulated and sent me back to climb up, almost from the beginning again."

Jane and Anthony always shared their knowledge of people and things. Her brother had told her of the early association of Matthew Ballantine and their guardian. She was certain now that the "brief difficulty" to which Mr. Ballantine referred so casually was the break in his business, when Jonathan Jarvis had stepped out of it, in his determined purpose of going forward and leaving his partner behind.

"And in all your life have you always done — just this?" Jane waved her hand to indicate the office, the lumberyard behind and the clattering sawmill beyond the lumber piles.

A slow smile spread across Mr. Ballantine's face as though he were contemplating some inner and delightful memory of which he alone knew.

"Almost all my life," he said. She knew by his look that he did not intend to admit her into the secret of what that "almost" might mean. They looked at each other, he in determined, smiling silence, she in eager and baffled curiosity. He could see that her eyes were pleading with him to tell her the truth; but he was firm in his denial.

"No," he said, as though she had been begging out loud. Perhaps he felt that, by coming upon him when

he was off his guard, she had already drawn from him far more than he meant to tell.

The firmest resolution, however, can be broken down by the accident of chance. Along the street was coming the tumbling music of the hurdy-gurdy, its changing tunes vaguely audible through all of their talk. It may, indeed, have been that far-off strain of droning harmony which had set Matthew Ballantine to singing.

Now the voice of the hand organ was loud and insistent; for the player had stopped in the street directly outside. Jane opened the door, and saw Methuselah, very much displeased at being aroused from his slumbers, and grumpily regarding the weary-looking, dark-faced musician and his battered monkey. A smaller Italian boy followed the hurdy-gurdy man, a ragged youngster, who carried a wheezy accordion. He was evidently no skilled player; for the sounds he drew from his instrument were mere grunts and groans, to which discords he added little harmony by singing listlessly in a high, cracked voice.

Matthew Ballantine had come out to stand beside Jane on the doorstep and to watch the forlorn trio. The monkey scrambled down from his perch on the top of the hurdy-gurdy and advanced with his cup for pennies. Even he looked discouraged and as though he scarcely expected any return for his efforts.

The music hesitated, hitched itself forward a few notes, then hesitated again and died away in the midst of a bar. The musician seemed to have decided that it was not worth while to turn the crank through one

more revolution. The boy folded together his accordion with one final pathetic squeak from its interior. The disheartened group prepared to move on.

Jane felt her heart moved to pity; so also, it seemed, did Matthew Ballantine. He stepped across the doorstone into the street and said something to the boy which was evidently Italian for, "Give that to me."

The lad's brown face lit with pleasure at the sound of his own language. He surrendered the accordion readily into the other's hands. Matthew Ballantine moved it in and out for a moment; then, directing the hurdy-gurdy man to strike up a new tune, he began to play.

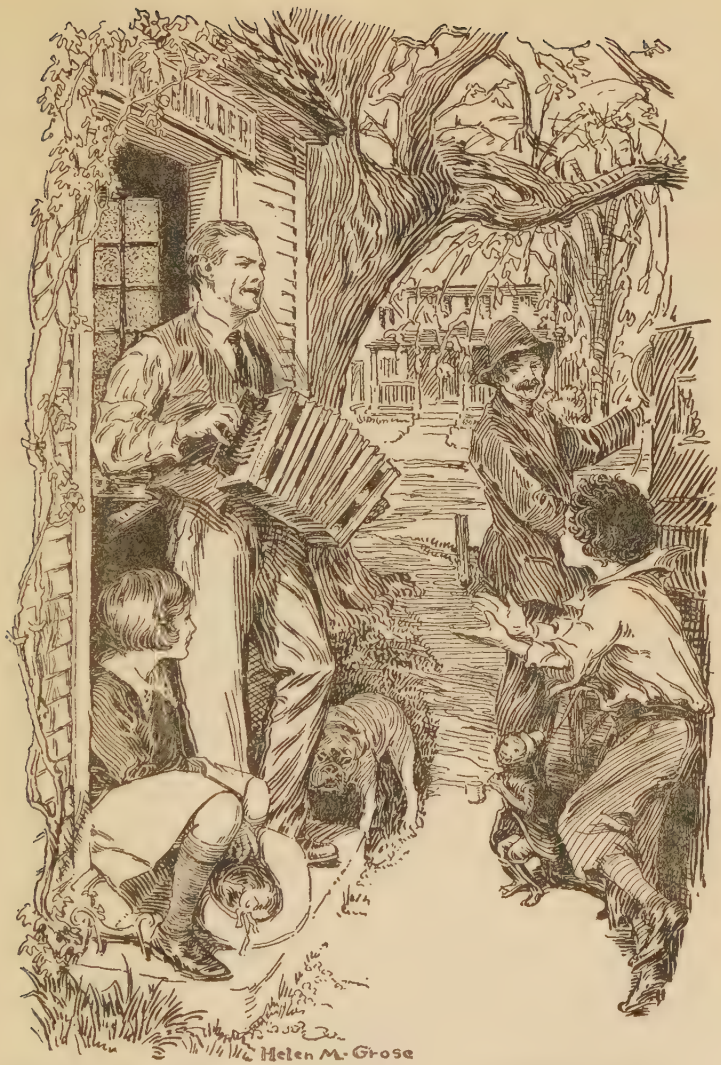
No groans and grunts were to be heard now, for of a very different order was Matthew Ballantine's performance. A gay rollicking air came streaming forth, following the lively music of the hand-organ, now turned with vigor by its delighted owner. The boy, with Latin exuberance, flung his hands into the air and began dancing, while the monkey hopped solemnly up and down in time to the music.

The first tune came to an end. There was a volley of questions, answers, jokes, laughter and repartee, all carried on in voluble Italian. The two brown-faced musicians seemed completely transformed from the disconsolate pair which had trailed down the street a few moments before. They grinned, chattered, gesticulated, seemed to be asking question after question of Matthew Ballantine. Then the hurdy-gurdy man pulled a lever, and started the music again. It was a

tune which even Jane could recognize, "Santa Lucia." Matthew Ballantine knew it well, for standing on the doorstep, his head thrown back, his shock of gray hair standing up in the breeze, he was playing the air and singing in his big voice.

Another tune followed and another, sung by all three together: "O Sole Mio" and "L'Addio a Napoli"; then airs from "Rigoletto." Jane was conscious that she had heard these before, and observed that they were all contained in the repertoire of the hurdy-gurdy. When that wheezy instrument knew no more melodies and finally stood still for very exhaustion, Matthew Ballantine went on, singing and playing while the others sang with him, strange, gayly light-hearted songs which she had never before heard. They were accompanied, on the part of the two foreigners, by clapping of the hands, slapping of the knees, shouts interpolated at intervals in the refrain. Italian street songs, they seemed to be, quite unknown to the world of classical music, but evidently familiar to Matthew Ballantine.

The street was empty at that hour of the day, so that no passers-by came to witness this strange entertainment. Jane saw a startled face or two at windows of neighboring houses; but on the whole, she and Methuselah made up the most of the audience. The fat old bulldog seemed much astonished by the behavior of his master; he limped up to sniff at his legs, in the effort to make sure that it was really he. Finally, having satisfied himself that he was not mistaken in the person, he lay down again on the threshold of the open



The boy flung his hands into the air and began dancing.

door, evidently having come to the conclusion that anything which his owner did must surely be right.

At last Matthew Ballantine, quite out of breath, brought his singing to an end. He handed the accordion back to the younger Italian and beckoned to him to send the monkey up the steps. He emptied his pockets into the little creature's cup and waved away the torrent of gratitude and blessing poured out upon him by the two vagabond musicians.

"No, no," he said firmly and more than once, evidently in answer to their pleadings for an explanation of why a solid and dignified man of business should display such knowledge of their own art.

Very reluctantly the two departed down the street, the boy often looking back over his shoulder, the man turning the barrel of his organ as he moved along, grinding out a farewell song. Matthew Ballantine, with Jane beside him, went in and closed the door. The music dwindled in the distance and died away before either of the two spoke.

"Do you wonder how I came to forget myself so strangely?" he asked her.

She shook her head without replying and he added, voicing the thought which she could not put into words:

"Perhaps I was only remembering something that I could not forget."

He sat down in the chair by the desk, and motioned her to sit also, but she came close and stood beside him.

"Tell me," she begged, "where did you learn all — all that?"

He drew a long breath.

"There was one year of my life," he said, "when I did just as I wished, when I was free for a time to seek what I wanted. Except for the little fact that I had no money at all, I was absolutely master of the world and all it could give me. My work had prospered enough for me to leave it to another's care for a certain time. I was very weary from years of straining effort, and it seemed that I must find a rest of some sort. My mother had been wishing to make a long visit to some cousins in California and it seemed well for her health to be in that warm climate for a year. So things suddenly fell into line together, as they will sometimes do, to give me the leisure and liberty I had so longed for. I was still young then; there was still fire within me as I set out to see the world with nothing in my pocket, with my father's violin in my hand, and with my grandfather's roving blood burning in my veins."

"And where did you go?" Jane's eyes were round with delighted wonder.

"I worked here, I played my fiddle there, and so gathered money enough to carry me to the seaboard. I shipped in a cattle boat for Liverpool, working my passage, and a rough and unhappy passage it was. I walked across England, very gray and drab and chill at just that season. I did not linger there, for my face was set toward France."

Without interrupting him, Jane dragged up a high

stool, the nearest seat, and climbed upon it, never taking her eyes from his face.

"It was a windy and rainy voyage across the Channel but the sun was shining bravely as I came ashore in France. My grandfather never willingly spoke English, so I had known French and some Italian from my early days, and had learned enough of French ways to be happily at home. I sought out first the little village from which he had come, and there I fell in with a fellow not far from my own age, but so like Grandfather Pierre that I could have believed it was himself come to life and grown young again. A tinker, a jack-of-all-trades and a musician; such he was, and a strolling vagabond besides. With him I made a journey across France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, a magic journey which I can hardly believe in, even now. We worked at every sort of trade in the world; we played at country fairs; we slept in the lofts of inns or under hedgerows; and we saw the world as no rich and comfortable traveler can ever hope to see it. There is no time to tell you all the strange and beautiful things we came across, — yes, and ugly and cruel things also. My comrade cared for little except to quench his thirst for roving; but I had another purpose, the one which had led me when I first set out.

"Wherever we went, wherever there was opportunity, I heard music. The great singers, the great violinists, the great pianists of all the world, I heard them in that year. Somehow I managed to wander from one city to another where they were to be heard, and to

gather the few pennies necessary for a place at their concerts and operas, a seat far up under the roof where a shabby fellow with the dust of the highroad upon him was not noticed among a multitude of other shabby fellows much like himself. I listened with such straining eagerness that it seemed to me those upon the vast gilded stage below must have felt the intensity of my delight and must be making their music for me alone."

"Did you have any chance to study, to learn to play from any of them?" Jane wished to know.

"I had no money for lessons, nor much time, since that one year was all that I was ever to be able to call quite my own. There was an old fellow in Bavaria who heard me play and who urged me to stop and study with him, arranging to teach me for little or nothing. But the third day that I went for my lesson he was ill and his wife — ah, what a tongue an angry German *hausfrau* can have. She told me plainly what she thought of a penniless stroller who would take up the time of her good and generous husband. I could not but agree with her, and went upon my way, catching up my comrade at the next village, feeling somewhat sore at heart, but having learned a lesson which the good old musician had not meant to teach me. After that, I studied music only by hearing it, but on hearing I feasted all up and down France and Germany and Italy.

"I had left home in midsummer, and it was in the spring of the next year that we came down over the Alps into Lombardy. My wandering was nearly at an

end; yet here it seemed that I could gladly wander forever. The little hill towns, the soft green plains, the cities like jewels, the mountains jutting into the bluest sea in the world, — I could never see enough of them. The months passed; the time when I had promised to return came nearer and nearer, yet it seemed that enchanted land must hold me always. I said farewell to my good comrade who was tramping the long highroad to southern Italy. I went down to the seacoast, toward the little port from which I was to sail. As I came near, my road led along the face of mountains above the sea; at every turn the outlook was more glorious, at every mile that wide prospect of water and sky and rugged hills, of white villages and brown-sailed fishing boats seemed to burn its beauty deeper into my heart. I stopped on a high promontory, left the road and walked out among the pine trees to the very edge of a tall cliff. I looked and looked and looked and I cried out loud, 'I cannot leave it; I cannot go back.' I took up my violin and sitting up there alone with the trees and the sea and the sky, I played and played. With all the music that was in me, I played a good-by to that beauty and freedom, to all those dreams that I was leaving behind me. I said I could not go back, but I knew I must."

He paused. "Go on," said Jane. She was too much absorbed to have any recollection of manners.

"At last there came the moment when I would have to go onward if I was to reach my ship in time. I knew then that I must go, that I could not put away from me

the work that fate had decreed that I must do. My heart was so sore within me that I told myself bitterly that I must go home to be a dull, toiling drudge all the rest of my life, and that I would try to forget forever all the beauty, the freedom, and happiness of that year of holiday. I would leave it all behind me — all. There was a great rock close beside me, with a hollow below it; inside that hollow I laid my violin and pushed a heavy stone over the place to hide it. I would never play again. Then I tramped away down the road, never looking back, making all haste, for the time was short."

"And you left your violin behind, for always?" Jane exclaimed.

"I thought it was for always. A young man thinks many strange things when his heart is sore. I made a headlong, breathless journey down to my little port. Just as I was about to board my ship, I was stopped upon the wharf. Some one came up behind me; a long, skinny hand was laid on my arm and a voice said in Italian:

"'Here is what you left behind, Signor.'

"I turned about in astonishment and saw a very old and ragged peasant, a man who had probably been herding goats on the mountainside near where I had been sitting to look out upon the sea. He was holding out to me — my violin.

"'But I meant to leave it behind,' I said stupidly, and without gratitude for his having hurried so far to give my property back to me.

"'I know you meant to leave it,' he returned. 'I

A voice said in Italian, "Here is what you left behind, Signor."

watched you sitting there; I heard you play. I saw you lay the violin away beneath the stone. Ah, you hot-headed young men, you think that all in a minute you can put an end to something that is to be a part of your very self for all time. We old ones who sit on the mountain watching the winds and the tides, we learn to know better. Take your violin. Your soreness of heart will pass and you will play again. And make haste to get on board your ship, for she is about to sail without you.'

"He was gone, away up the empty, sunlit quay, without allowing me another word. Any other man would have at least waited for a gift of money in return for such a service; but it was not for money that he had come so far. For a long half-day's journey he had followed me, just to tell me that I was wrong and to give me back what I had forsaken."

Matthew Ballantine stopped for a moment and smiled across at Jane.

"And he was right, my dear; I did not put music out of my life, though I could no longer follow a dream. I came home to Winstead, to toil and to prosper a little, and, in the end, to forget the bitter regret for all I had been forced to forego. I was miserable, restless and unhappy for a long time thereafter; but at last I won victory over myself; and on that day when I felt that I was once again master of my bitterness, I took out my violin and played again. You may be sure that in my heart, I thanked that nameless old Italian who had been wiser than I."

He got up, crossed the little room, and brought a chair to set beside the desk opposite him.

"Climb down from that high stool," he said. "I have been too much occupied in talking of myself to pay attention to your comfort. I am not used to babble my secrets so; you seem to have caught me unawares."

Jane nodded slowly. All her life she was to be the sort of person to whom others were moved to tell their secrets; she knew already that people talked to her more freely than was their wont to others. She felt that she could not, yet, make any comment on what Mr. Ballantine had told her, and so she slipped down from the stool without speaking.

He settled her in her chair and said in his most matter-of-fact tone:

"We have wasted a good deal of time on preliminaries; now tell me what it was that brought you here."

"I came to see you on business," she answered very seriously. As he sat down opposite her with his face properly composed for the discussion of important affairs, she came to the point of her errand. "I want to ask how much it costs to build a house."

"There are houses and houses," he returned. "The cost depends on the kind of house you want."

"We want a house for Nora," she told him. "A little, cosy house, very pleasant and comfortable and with a gold chimney."

"Now there is an idea," he exclaimed. "A gold chimney! People put up houses here and houses there, all so tiresomely alike. There are a few more

modern improvements each time, perhaps, but never anything really new or interesting. And now you and Anthony think of something that never occurred to dull fellows like me who ought to know their business. Certainly it is the only thing that would make a house really good enough for Nora Carmichael. As I understand it, you would like a house different in every way from the one you are living in now."

Jane beamed upon him. It was plain that he had her idea exactly.

"We want to know how much it will cost, so that we can begin planning for it," she said.

"Just where are you arranging to build?" he wished to know, after a moment of pondering.

"We rather think that Apple Creek Pasture would be the best place," she suggested.

"You are right," he agreed. "I have never understood why half the town has not seen that Apple Creek Hill is the best bit of ground we have for air and outlook. You and Anthony show your good judgment. If I were like most builders, I would say at once, 'I suppose you will want to cut down the apple tree.' "

"Oh," she exclaimed in such horror that he could not pursue that joke farther.

"By the way," he went on, seeming to be struck by a sudden thought, "has Anthony said anything to Roger about your idea?"

"I believe he has," said Jane. "We see a good deal of Roger now; Anthony brought him home to supper

a few nights ago. They were talking about the house, I am sure, while I was helping Nora wash the dishes."

"Now I understand what the boy was about, when he was drawing last night." Matthew Ballantine got up and went to look among some papers piled up on the drawing table. "And how do you and Nora like Roger Jarvis?"

"Oh, we like him," Jane declared with enthusiasm. "It used to be that just to hear the name Jarvis made me feel funny in my inside; but now we know Roger and he is so nice, I think quite differently."

"Yes," Mr. Ballantine was nodding gravely as if to himself, "I seem to have had much the same feelings as you describe." He selected two sheets of paper and laid the first of them upon her lap. "What do you think of that, Mistress Jane?"

Her cry of utter delight was quite answer enough. He had given her Roger's sketch of the apple tree, completed now in a delicately finished pen-and-ink drawing of really masterly workmanship. The grace and intricate beauty of the old tree were as faithfully portrayed as its rugged, misshapen, weather-beaten strength. The pleasure on Jane's face was reflected in Matthew Ballantine's.

"The boy is a beautiful draughtsman; he has taste and aptitude and has been well taught by somebody. And I never saw such an appetite for work. He is busy all day, out on the job; and he is learning fast, so Nelson tells me. And in the evening he comes in here to draw. I am teaching him to draught house plans.

He had known nothing about that sort of drawing; but he will do better than I can myself in a short time. We work here together after supper every night. I like to see his yellow head over there in the corner. It is a long time since I have had a good comrade in this business of mine."

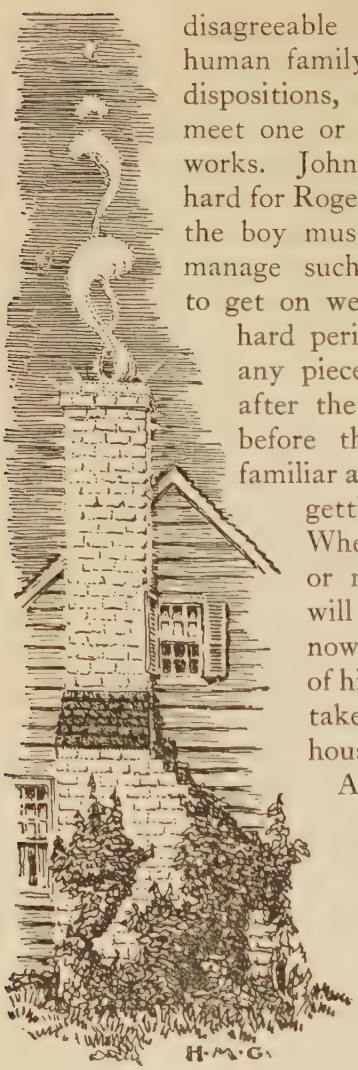
Jane thought once more of the tale which Roger Jarvis had to tell. Was Jonathan Jarvis ever good company, she wondered, in those days before he grew gray and shrewd and calculating? If Matthew Ballantine had ever enjoyed the elder Jarvis' companionship, how much more pleasure he must take in that of the younger.

"Does Roger talk to you about wanting to be an architect?" she asked.

"He has said a little. He does not yet talk to me as he would to Anthony; but I can see that to study architecture is the ambition that fills his whole heart. No, he has one greater wish; I can see that also, though he has not told me. But he has all the gifts of an artist and an artisan, and such a combination is what makes an architect. If he should be one, some day, it will do him no harm to have taken overalls and hammer and plane and to have learned how houses are actually built, and what carpenters and masons and brick layers are thinking and saying as they build them."

"Is he learning that now?" Jane wished to know.

"He is learning that and many other things. He is finding out what every one must know in time, that there is always one man on a job that makes things



disagreeable for all the others. The human family contains some very bad dispositions, and a man is certain to meet one or two of them, wherever he works. John Wythe is making things hard for Roger, but I am not interfering; the boy must learn for himself how to manage such a fellow. Roger seems to get on well, but there is always a hard period to go through with in any piece of work. That time is after the novelty is worn off, and before the labor has become so familiar as to be easy. Roger is just getting to that difficult time. Whether he can win through it or not, I do not know. We will see — we will see! And now here is another drawing of his for you to see. If I mistake not, it is his idea of your house with a gold chimney."

Anthony must have given Roger a very full description of that house they hoped to build for Nora. And Roger, in his turn, had put down faithfully every detail of sweeping roof, white walls, sunny

windows, flower boxes, and wide, hospitable front door. Very remotely, it bore resemblance to the cabin on the hill, although it was bigger, its proportions were less clumsy, and its lines, translated into terms of slate and stucco, were more graceful than could ever have been achieved with unwieldy blocks of limestone and rough-hewn logs. It was like a pleasant, modern, and more beautiful younger sister of their well-loved cabin. By some device known to an adroit artist, he had given to one chimney the appearance of giving forth brightness, as though it were shining in the sun and as though it were, indeed, made of gold.

"I heard him chuckling to himself as he was making it," said Matthew Ballantine. "I asked him once what he was doing; but he said he was sketching a house for some prospective clients and would show it to me when it was ready 'to submit to the owners.' You, I take it, are one of the clients. How do you like my new assistant's work?"

"It is exactly right," Jane declared joyfully. "See, he has even made a rose garden at the side; because I said we should like to have one. How did he know so well how to make our house?"

"The boy has n't a notion in the world how to set about building it, but he sees the vision of it in his mind and that is what a true builder must be able to do. He and I will talk over this picture and make some plan of the inside, and then we will be able to tell you something of the cost, my dear Miss Jane."

"Thank you," said Jane, "that is what we wanted.

It seems more as though it were really going to happen if you begin planning for it. If I wish very hard, every day, don't you think it might come true?"

"I do indeed," he agreed heartily. "There is nothing like wishing, to make things come."

Jane stood up. Her business was at an end, and the room was becoming shadowy. It was evidently time for her to go. But she stepped close to Matthew Ballantine's chair and looked at him with direct, shining eyes.

"There is one more thing I want to know," she said. "Where is your violin?"

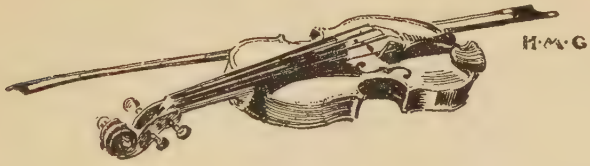
Matthew Ballantine returned her steady look and sat long without moving. Few people, however, were able to resist Jane; for her desires were so great they filled her whole being and overflowed into the heart of the person she besought. Mr. Ballantine was certainly not one of those who could withhold that for which she begged.

"I have let you into many of my secrets, you engaging young lady," he said; "I may as well admit you to one more."

He got up and opened a little cupboard in the wall behind his desk.

"Here," he said, "is the battered old instrument with which my grandfather fiddled his way from the Old Country into the New. He taught me to play on it, and there is good music in the dear old thing still. And here," he took down a shining violin of lustrous, mellow brown, "here is my father's violin, with which

a very eager-hearted and headlong young man fiddled his way from the New World back to the Old."



He brought the instrument out into the firelight, tuned it for a moment, then put it to his shoulder. He took up the bow and drew it across the strings. He looked very tall and thin, standing there in the shadows, his head bent over the violin. His face was lit partly by the glow from the hearth, partly by an expression which Jane could not read and which she had never seen before.

Slowly there stole through the room a deep, humming harmony, that filled the four walls as rippling water fills the bowl of a fountain. The music lifted and sang, seeming to scatter sunshine, rainbows, jewels, and every rare and precious thing as it swept upward. It hovered on the high notes for a moment of exquisite melody then dropped softly. Jane thought of the white swans dropping down out of the sky, as the violin fell to silence.

She had listened, quivering, her eyes never leaving Matthew Ballantine's face. When he finished she said no word, but came close and stroked the smooth, satiny wood of the violin. Mr. Ballantine smiled

quietly; the strange look was gone now, and he was quite his same, usual self again.

"And now," he said, "I will get my hat and walk home with you, for Nora will be asking why I have kept you so long. We will take this drawing with us, for Roger was making it for you."

He took up the picture of the apple tree and slipped it into a stiff envelope to keep it safe.

"Mr. Ballantine," Jane burst out, "how wrong, how terrible it is, that you should not live as you wanted, that you should not do what you would like to do."

"My dear," he answered, the same quiet smile still upon his face, "sometimes life seems to me to be like that crooked apple tree of which you are so fond. It is bent, twisted and storm-beaten; but it knows leaf and bud and blossom; it still bears flowers and fruit, just the same."

CHAPTER VII

THE HERMIT OF APPLE CREEK

ANTHONY and Mr. Thrale were unpacking a big box of bulbs, beside the garage in the Thrale garden.

"There seem to be thousands of them, though I only ordered two hundred," said Mr. Thrale dejectedly. "I suppose we will have to bury them somewhere." He took one up in his hand. "Probably this flat end is the one that goes uppermost," he decided.

Anthony had been examining the other bulbs.

"I see a few roots on this one, coming out of the flat end," said he, "so perhaps the pointed part is the top. We are n't very good gardeners, are we, Mr. Thrale?"

"No," was the unenthusiastic answer. "And for my part, I don't much care to be. I never did understand how people could talk so much about loving the gardens they tended themselves. For myself, I like a garden best when some one else has done the work in it. Well, I suppose the best place to bury the tulips is here below the hedge."

He took up a spade, sighed deeply and thrust it into the ground. When Anthony took a trowel and began making a trench in which to lay the tulip bulbs, he paused in his digging to give advice.

"We would save more time if we would lay out the rows in the other direction," he said, then sighed again.

"I always keep thinking how to save time; and now there is no need to save it, for I have to spend a certain amount of it every day in this everlasting garden."

"I would like to save the time," Anthony answered. "I want to see all these bulbs planted this morning, because Jane and I are going nutting this afternoon. There are lots of hickory nuts on the slopes of Apple Creek Hill. We will bring you some, Mr. Thrale."

"It is very good of you to help me with my planting, Anthony," said Mr. Thrale. "The doctors made me promise I would not hire a helper for fear I should leave all the work to him, and I would, too, I am afraid. I am ashamed to leave all the work to you, so I get on very well indeed, when you are here. But it hardly seems fair to you."

"I like to help you," the boy returned. "I really like gardening. I could plant things all day, though I don't know anything about it."

"That is why I enjoy your help," Mr. Thrale explained. "You do not laugh at what I do, and I know that a practiced gardener would. But I won't let you delay your nutting party, no matter how many tulips go begging for holes."

He redoubled his energies, and actually managed to accomplish an excellent morning's work, with Anthony as assistant. A month had passed since that Saturday when Anthony had first seen Roger; and the autumn was now advanced to Indian summer. The sunlight was a little paler than during the glowing days of October, there was a crisp tang of cold in the air, and thick

hoar frost could be seen in the mornings covering the lawns and flower beds.

When noon came, Mr. Thrale, warmed to the pleasant glow that is the reward of exercise, a little tired, and very proud of all that he had done, put away his spade and bade his companion do the same. He had almost enjoyed himself during those hours of hard work in Anthony's company; yet was afraid to admit it even to himself, lest he be mistaken. But all the bulbs were planted, after a fashion, and the beds raked smooth above them.

"Tell Jane that I was very careful what I thought of, when I put them in," he said. "It does seem to me that I did not have my mind quite so much on dollars and cents as I usually do. It must be your good talk, Anthony. Now run along to your lunch and your nutting, and good luck to you."

Promptly after dinner Jane and Anthony set out. Over his shoulder Anthony carried a burlap bag to be filled with hickory nuts. Jane, with more modest ambitions, carried a basket on her arm. Brian frisked about them with those rocking-horse motions peculiar to young dogs, rejoicing over being taken to walk.

"Shall we get Roger?" Anthony asked, and Jane agreed at once, "Yes, it would be nice to have him go."

They turned their steps toward Jefferson Street and wondered, as they went along, if Mr. Ballantine could spare Roger, even though it was a Saturday afternoon.

"Nels Nelson said to Joe Waite's father that they were swamped with work," Anthony recollected. "Joe says some machinery broke down in the mill and they are having a bad time getting it running again, with orders piling up every day. Mr. Ballantine looked worried when I saw him last, talking to Nelson down on Eastman Square. Even that building is n't getting on very well. The man who is having it put up wanted something that Mr. Ballantine said was n't practical or safe. Perhaps we had n't better ask Roger, after all."

He stopped, standing irresolute for a moment. "I see Methuselah on the doorstep," he said finally. "We can just go to the door and see if Roger is there and whether or not he is too busy."

They came to the shop door, knocked, and went in. Mr. Ballantine was alone, sitting at his desk, not singing now, but deep in a pile of specifications. As he glanced up at them, his face looked very tired and depressed.

"Roger?" he repeated in answer to Jane's question. "Did n't you know? Roger is gone."

"Gone!" they both echoed. "Where?"

"I do not know — home, I suppose. He had been working a month; he got his pay envelope yesterday and seemed so pleased and happy with his first wages. He insisted on paying me for his lodging; but he had enough left and more, to take him home. I was out in the evening, but he came hurrying in and said something to my mother about going away. She does not

hear very well, so she is not certain just what he was telling her. It hardly matters; the fact remains that he is gone."

"I can't believe it!" cried Anthony. "How could he go and leave you without a word?"

"Ned Wade saw him take the evening train, so we know he has left Winstead. He could n't stand it, I suppose. It is hard work for a boy to buckle to and earn his living, — too hard for Roger, I suppose, when he did n't really have to do it. I shall miss him. I was just beginning to feel that I could depend on him."

Jane and Anthony both observed suddenly that he looked old — old, weary and sick at heart. But he made no further comment on Roger's departure and the two slipped away, unwilling to take more of his time.

They had walked some distance from the shop before either spoke.

"How could he?" cried Anthony at last.

"What made him do it?" pondered Jane with less heat. "There must have been some reason, somehow. No one could go away from Mr. Ballantine that way, certainly no one like Roger."

Apple Creek Pasture looked out upon a world faintly veiled with autumn haze, and absolutely still, with the quiet that precedes the long sleep of winter. There were no passing flocks of geese now, no call of quail, scarcely even a rustle in the grass to disturb the silence. Only a busy woodpecker, hammering a dead tree far

down the slope, made a faint rat-tat-tat that could be heard all across the hill.

Before they began to look for nuts, each of them gathered an armful of dead branches at the edge of the wood and carried them up to the cabin. This had come to be a custom with them. Anthony and Roger had come to the hill one day when the weather was raw and cold; they had gone into the cabin, had built a fire on the big hearth and had sat by it for a cosy hour, talking of their own affairs and of the men who had dwelt there so long ago. It had been Roger's idea that they should gather a store of wood, while the weather was fine, so that they might have fuel for fires when the winter came.

"It won't be so easy to pick up wood when the snow is deep," he had suggested wisely; so that all of them had spent some little of their time every week in collecting fuel to pile in the storeroom. Now Roger was gone, and it was with heavy hearts that the other two set about the task which he had always shared. His idea was still a good one, even though he was no longer there to help them put it into execution.

When at last they had accomplished enough to satisfy themselves, they once more took up basket and bag and set out to scour the bushy hillside for nuts.

"Why did you bring the covered basket?" asked Anthony. "Nora would n't like it if it should be lost."

"I will be careful of it," Jane assured him. She did not explain why she had preferred that basket to any other.

The hickory trees were scattered here and there along the slope, most of them growing on the steep declivity that went down to the river. The clean white nuts had tumbled out of their hulls and lay scattered among the dry leaves, an abundant harvest to be gathered by any one who sought them. Anthony's bag grew lumpy and heavy as he searched industriously among the rustling leaves, and added steadily to his store. Jane's efforts were less painstaking; she would pick up a few nuts, drop them into her basket, and then stop to watch the still autumn world about her.

She and the busily intent Anthony drifted a little apart; for he was exploring the wooded hillside thoroughly and systematically, while she was wandering here and there, led more by impulse and fancy than by any definite purpose.

The river, seen through openings among tree stems, was as still as a looking-glass, with only a long streak here and there to show where the current ran counter to a reef, or a riffle of rapids. A lazy cloud, drifting idly across the sky, dropped a purple shadow on the still water, and moved slowly from the opposite bluff,

across the broad stream toward the spot where she stood.

"I wonder if it is going to pass right over me," thought Jane, and sat down upon a fallen tree trunk to watch it. She heard a soft rustle not far from her and looked up to see a pair of bright eyes regarding her through the stripped branches of a clump of hazel bushes.

"It must be a rabbit," she decided, catching a glimpse of brownish fur.

She sat so still that the creature evidently decided that she was a mere part of the landscape, a somewhat unusual feature perhaps, but harmless. It moved forward, very silent even in the dry underbrush, and showed itself to be as large as five or six rabbits and evidently not of that species. Presently it advanced from the sheltering bushes and sat up, very square upon its haunches, to inspect her again. It now revealed itself as an oversized groundhog, a stout gentleman with a small inquiring face, a brief, bushy tail and an absurdly fat body. An easy-going, cheerful individual it seemed to be, an amiable Mr. Pickwick among groundhogs. Jane watched it for a moment, then, so pompously dignified

was its attitude as it stared at her, that she could not forbear laughing out loud. In a whisk of gray-brown fur, the animal was gone, disappearing so quickly that it might have taken on itself invisibility. It had sought refuge in some snug burrow, where, but for the unusually mild weather, it would long since have been asleep for the winter.

The cloud had, indeed, passed directly overhead, enveloping Jane and the trees and bushes around her in chill shadow. It seemed suddenly a little lonely there on the hillside, with the sun gone and Anthony out of sight. She could hear his voice calling to Brian, somewhere beyond a shoulder of the hill.

"Oh, dear, I have so few nuts," she thought. It was high time that she set to work in earnest, if she were to have anything like a basket full.

She trudged along the face of the hill, but found few nuts, so thoroughly had Anthony already gone over the ground. Walking further, she passed around a turn in the steepness of the slope and came out upon the less precipitous hillside which dropped down to Apple Creek. Here the nut trees were more thinly scattered, but their harvest had not yet been gathered, so that she began, little by little, to have a respectable store in the bottom of her basket.

Without intending it, she had come farther and farther down the slope until she was fairly at the bottom of the little valley and close to the edge of the creek itself. There was not much water flowing over the ledges of limestone which formed its bed and dropping

with a cool splash from one level of smooth stone to another. The banks were lined with slim sycamore trees, their spotted trunks showing their soft gray, white and buff, as they stood in ranks close to the water. Dry sycamore leaves are more crisp and crackling than any other kind, so that she enjoyed hearing them crunch and rustle under her feet. The cloud had passed, the sun was out again, and the woodpecker they had heard earlier in the afternoon was very busy almost over her head.

Just before her was a wide shallow pool, across which a row of broken slabs of rock lay like stepping-stones. And directly opposite, on a tiny stretch of flat ground, stood the biggest hickory tree she had yet discovered. Even from where she stood she could see how thickly strewn were the white nuts all about the open ground at its feet.

She scarcely noticed that a little path showed beside the tall hickory, a path which led up through the trees toward that tumble-down cottage in the bend of the creek. For long she had thought of the place as deserted, and so neglected and shabby as not to be worth consideration. She did not take heed of a little curl of smoke going up from the chimney, a most unwonted thing for that forlorn dwelling place. Her eyes were only upon the abundance of nuts, as she crossed the stream upon the stepping-stones.

The tree was even more generous than had been apparent from across the creek; so that Jane could collect the spoils with rapid ease. Handful after hand-

ful she dropped into the basket, peering under the cover now and then to make sure of the safety of something that lay within. She lifted the basket finally, found that it was growing heavy, and decided that she had almost enough. One more double handful and she would go. She stooped for a last search, then stood upright with both hands piled high. Surely now she had all that she could carry.

A sudden furious barking behind her startled her into dropping the nuts in a pattering rain among the leaves. She looked over her shoulder and saw a big, ragged-looking dog come leaping and snarling down the path, — a huge, dirty-gray beast that looked like a wolf. He was the biggest dog she had ever seen; and he showed all his teeth, bared in a vicious grin. With a gasp of frantic terror, she ran for safety across the stepping-stones. She missed her footing and splashed one foot into the water, before she reached the other shore. A rough voice speaking to the dog made her pause and turn to look, frightened as

she was. A tall, dark-faced man had come slouching down the path and was standing under the hickory tree. At an order from him, the big dog had stood still at the edge of the creek, still growling furiously but evidently forbidden to come further. The man looked across at Jane, then gave her a smile of malicious intent which hardly differed from the snarling grin of the dog.

"I don't allow trespassers to come on my lands," he said in surly tones. "Can't you see that sign."

He indicated a rude notice board nailed to the hickory tree high above Jane's head. At no time could she have deciphered the home-made lettering; certainly she could make nothing of it now, but merely stood staring at him.

"I don't want folks to come around here," he repeated. "I won't have it. Whatever they leave when they 're trespassing, that 's mine."

Without more ado, he picked up the basket which she had left under the tree, and walked away toward the little house, the big dog padding at his heels. Jane, stricken with fear, could not utter a sound of protest as she watched them go. Not until they disappeared into the house did she turn to run up the slope to the pasture calling wildly, "Anthony, Anthony!"

Her brother, meanwhile, had progressed unhurried, from tree to tree, bestowing nuts in his bag until it bulged to the top. He watched Brian at his favorite game of nosing out rabbits, little scuttling balls of fur, with a bit of white tail flaunting defiance as they dropped into holes and burrows and probably laughed at him the moment they were inside. Now and then his thoughts drifted to Roger, and to his unhappy wonder why his friend should have disappeared so suddenly. Both the elder and the younger Jarvis seemed to give him food for disagreeable thought; he therefore put them both resolutely from his mind and turned his whole attention to the task of filling his bag.

He had just begun to realize that he had neither seen nor heard Jane for some time, and to reproach himself for his carelessness, when the sound of her voice came to him, calling him from beyond the hill. Even at that distance he knew that she was frightened. He dropped his burden and ran to meet her as she came over the ridge. Her face was pale, her eyes were wide with terror, and she could scarcely manage to tell him what had happened.

"Why, it is nothing but a basket lost," he tried to reassure her. "Nora will be a little sorry, but she won't scold you."

Jane was not, ordinarily, afraid of dogs; but the onslaught of the great beast, who seemed hungry to devour her, had left her thoroughly unstrung. And the lowering face of the man, with his strange snarling smile, was a nightmare memory that she was not soon

to forget. Yet there was still another cause for her panic-stricken grief, one which she came to at last.

"The basket!" she kept repeating, and then finally got out the unhappy statement, "Belinda was in it!"

"Belinda!" repeated Anthony. "What in the world—?"

"I just seemed to want her to come," faltered Jane. "And I know you don't much like to have dolls go with us, so I put her into the basket. I thought she would be so safe!"

They were walking across the hill, where the long shadows warned them that it was time to start homeward. Brian went from one to the other, trying to discover what it was that was so seriously wrong with these two whom he loved so dearly. Both, however, were too much intent upon their own thoughts to give him any notice.

That Jane was not crying troubled Anthony more than if she had been dissolved in weeping. She was a child of few tears, and those mostly shed in distress over the pain of other people. The loss of Belinda was too great for words, even for bewailing. Jane was given to strong affections, and as Anthony well knew, the doll was extraordinarily dear to her tender heart. Inanimate as Belinda was, battered and dilapidated, she was yet the object upon which Jane had chosen to pour out the overflowing love of an intense nature. The little girl had few possessions; she was quite contented that they should not be many, since the beloved Belinda made up to her for the lack of all the rest.

"It is as if I should lose Brian," Anthony admitted to himself.

They had reached the edge of the little woodland which divided the pasture from the town, when Anthony stood still.

"You go on," he directed, "and take Brian with you. I am going back to get the basket."

"Oh, Anthony, should you?" protested Jane. "Had n't we better go home and tell Nora first?"

"Nora could n't do anything about it," he answered. "No, the man had no right to take your basket, and I am going back to tell him so. Don't you or Nora worry; I will be following you in a very few minutes."

"Then I am going with you," declared Jane vehemently.

But to this Anthony made such peremptory objection that she finally went forward alone as he desired. Brian walked beside her, obeying orders like the well-trained dog he was coming to be; but he looked back wistfully at his master many times, as though hopeful that he would alter his mind.

Anthony had gone through something of a struggle with himself before he reached his decision.

"It is only a doll lost," he kept saying, yet he knew in his heart that he should have kept better watch over Jane, and that the tragedy which had occurred was largely through his fault. His indignation burned hot within him at the thought that any one should rob and frighten helpless Jane. There were certain responsibilities resting upon him as the man of the house-

hold. Since there was no one else, it must be upon him that the care and protection of his sister rested. Yes, not only care of Jane, but of Nora. He realized that he could not do everything that a man could do; but he would at least do his utmost.

As he walked back over the ridge, he had a moment of overwhelming desire to turn homeward and ask Mr. Ballantine to go with him. But his good friend was so hard driven by work and anxiety, that this was no time for troubling him with smaller affairs. It was plain that Anthony must accomplish his errand alone.

What was the man's name? Jerry Gibbs, that was what Anthony had heard him called during the course of that talk concerning him which had passed between Matthew Ballantine and Mark Lyman. He had not listened to all of the conversation, and had forgotten much even of what he had heard. Some portions came back to him — "a little Scotch, a little Indian and all the rest rascal." What he remembered was not reassuring.

He passed the cabin, went over the edge of the hill and clambered down the slope to Apple Creek. It was growing dusky in the valley, with the gray, mottled sycamore trunks looking like ghosts in the twilight. It was not yet too dark for him to see plainly the stepping-stones across the stream and the trail leading up past the hickory tree. He thought of Sigurd the Volsung going into battle with the hosts of darkness, and he walked forward with a stout heart, along the path to the door of the cottage. There was now a very

noticeable column of smoke going up from the chimney, and a dull red light showed behind the tiny windows. As the boy came near, a great clamor of fierce barking arose within. He could hear the big dog throw himself against the door in his efforts to get out at the intruder. A harsh voice spoke, and there was quiet, quiet that was rather worse than the noise had been.

Anthony's heart was hammering so loudly against his ribs that it seemed those two must hear it inside the house. To cover the sound of it he lifted his hand and knocked manfully upon the door.

CHAPTER VIII

STARSHINE

ANTHONY waited for a moment without hearing any answer, and then knocked upon the door again. The noise of barking inside was renewed more furiously than ever, nor was it hushed this time by any order from the man within. For some minutes the boy stood waiting; he thought that he heard feet going back and forth inside the cottage as though there were something that must be put out of sight before he could be admitted. Then at last he heard the man tell the dog, roughly, to "be still", and he heard heavy footsteps approaching the door. It was swung partly open and the dark face of Jerry Gibbs appeared.

"What do you want?" was the surly question that greeted him.

Anthony had repeated to himself several times, as he came alone, the words which he was to say. He cleared his throat now and spoke somewhat huskily:

"My sister accidentally left her basket on your side of the creek. I have come to get it."

"I told your sister that trespassers are n't allowed on my grounds and that whatever was left behind belongs to me. That is only right and fair. If you want the basket, you will have to buy it back. Or maybe you would rather come in and get it."

He grinned as he spoke the last words. The basket

stood in plain view upon the table in the corner, and beside it stood the great wolfish dog, growling thunderously to himself, with all the rough hair bristling along his back.

As Anthony looked about the interior of the cottage, he found it a most uninviting place. From outside, the house seemed as forlorn and tumble-down a hovel as one would hope to find; within, the single room was as bare as poverty could make it. There was some effort to achieve slovenly order, but there was very little to suggest cleanliness. Broken boots, a basin of dirty water, and a great mass of stuff hastily pushed under the rickety bed, — all were typical of the establishment of a poor and careless man who lived alone. Nora would have been aghast at the appearance of the cottage; Anthony noticed only its most outstanding features of dirt and dilapidation. And he observed one surprising thing, — a book, open on the table, with a black pipe lying on the page.

There was a roaring fire in the tiny stove, which, as Anthony could see, had heated the pipe to a red heat just below the ceiling. Some uninviting food was cooking in a black pot, filling the place with a greasy smell to which was added the strong scent of very rank tobacco. The odors in Jerry Gibbs' house matched its appearance. Anthony, even as he stood on the threshold, could scarcely endure the heat and the overpowering smells.

The man, himself, was rough looking and shabbily dressed, but he was not the uncouth and dirty tramp

that Anthony had expected to find. There was an independent swagger in his movements, and a boldness of bearing in his manner of carrying himself. There was more character and spirit in Jerry Gibbs than Anthony had looked for, while that dash of Indian which was said to be in him lent him a touch of romance. He was no mere broken-down vagabond, such as might have been expected.

"I'm not sure that I can buy back the basket," said Anthony; "I have hardly any money with me."

The last two words were somewhat superfluous; for the accumulated wealth which jingled in Anthony's pocket amounted to six cents and had stood at that figure for some time.

"The basket is worth a dollar," Jerry Gibbs declared, "without counting in the doll that 's inside. I can't say as she adds much value to what your sister left."

"The doll is what I came for," said Anthony. "My sister is very fond of her and she can't bear to give her up. Will you take what money I have, and give me the doll? Then you could keep the basket."

"No," returned Jerry Gibbs, "a dollar is what I 've got to have. Otherwise you do not get even the doll. It strikes me you are making a good deal of fuss about a broken-down rag baby with one eye."

Anthony reflected that Jane would be most indignant could she have heard the slighting terms with which the man referred to the beloved Belinda. She had once been a most superior doll, with smiling china features and a wig of curly brown hair. To call her a

rag baby was a most unnecessary insult. The man looked at him, grinning evilly, and with a mocking expression which was scarcely bearable. Anthony thrust both his hands into his pockets and clenched them under cover, in the effort to retain his self-control.

It was thus that his fingers came in contact with his watch. He had forgotten it for a moment; but now a new possibility presented itself to his unwilling mind.

"No," he protested wildly within himself, "I won't give up my watch. It is not fair." It seemed to him that it would be offering a queen's ransom for the unfortunate Belinda, should he give Jerry Gibbs his watch in exchange for the worn-out doll. But even as he rebelled against the idea, he knew that it was what he would have to do.

"It was my fault that my sister came this way and left the doll under your tree," he said with dignity. "I feel that it is my business to get it back for her. I will give you this for the basket and the doll."

Very slowly he drew out the fat, shining treasure and handed it to Jerry Gibbs. The man took it, weighed it in his hand, and then put it to his ear. Anthony flushed, for the last movement was only a jibe. There was no need of listening to the loud tick of the watch which filled the whole of the little room.

"It does seem to be going all right," Jerry Gibbs grinned. "But what would a plain fellow like me need of such an elegant timepiece as this? It is worth very nearly as much as the doll, but hardly as much as the basket."

Anthony was stirred with the anger for which he knew the man was hoping.

"It is all I have to give you," he declared, and did not try to say more.

"And what would all your folks say to your parting with your watch this way?" inquired the man.

"No one could say anything," replied Anthony. "I earned the money and bought the watch myself. And besides," he added, "I — I have n't any folks but Jane and Nora."

The provoking grin disappeared from the man's face as he stood still, weighing the watch in his hand. At last, very slowly, he slipped it into a gaping pocket. Anthony felt a pang as he saw the gleaming timepiece disappear; but he felt a great rush of relief as the man stepped across the little room and picked up the basket.

"Here, take it, and be off with you. Tell your sister not to come around here again. And both of you remember that I don't allow visitors anywhere near this house of mine."

He put the basket into Anthony's hand and without further word shut the door in his face. The boy cared very little for this lack of ceremony; he was only glad to plunge down the steps and hurry away along the path.

It was fairly dark now, so that he stumbled as he walked hastily down the rough trail, passed the hickory tree, and picked his way across the stepping-stones. He was burning with anger at the injustice and mocking impudence of Jerry Gibbs, but he was glad at least

The man weighed it in his hand, and then put it to his ear.

to have recovered his prize. He would hardly admit what a sense of loss had been left behind by his giving up his watch. There was no need for him to dwell upon that; the watch was gone and the incident was closed.

It was not closed as completely as he had thought. He was halfway up the slope of Apple Creek Hill when he heard footsteps tramping through dry leaves under the sycamore trees. Had Jerry Gibbs repented of the bargain, or what was the reason that he was following him? For a moment Anthony was tempted to flee in utter panic; but immediately his courage came back and he turned about to face the man. The big dog came first through the dark and stood snuffing and snarling about Anthony's feet.

Jerry Gibbs stepped through the shadows and came close to Anthony.

"Here, take your watch, boy," he said. "I 'm mean, and folks say I 'm none too honest; but I 'm not quite so low as to keep this. I 've not had very much money in my life; and I have found sometimes it 's easier to get it other ways than earning. But I do remember when I made my first dollar by honest work and it looked as big as a cart wheel to me. I thought I was going right on from there, and be President or something of the kind. I did n't get on just that way; I got started in another direction, but I do know what a boy thinks about the first thing he has earned. I just took the basket for a lesson to your sister. I won't have nobody, even kids, coming around here."

He shoved the watch under the cover of the basket,

wheeled about and was off into the valley before Anthony could speak. The boy stood looking after him, even though he could no longer see him in the dark, but could only hear his footsteps crunching through the leaves and striding across the stones in the creek. After some minutes, there was a momentary glow of light when the door of the cottage opened and closed again. Not until then did Anthony turn about and make all speed across the ridge toward home.

The apple tree stood out in black outline against the dusky sky. In the clear frosty air the first stars were brilliantly visible through the thin penciling of its branches. Only a few evenings before, when Anthony had been walking up the street in the dark with Matthew Ballantine, his friend had pointed out one or two shining constellations above the housetops.

"If it is summer for flowers," Mr. Ballantine had said, "it is autumn for stars!"

He was quite right, as Anthony could see now, for in the wide arch of sky above him, there was beginning to appear a glittering pattern of stars that far outshone any that he had seen in the soft skies of summer time.

Something rustled among the leaves beneath the tree, something dark and shyly apologetic came wriggling out of the darkness to his feet. It was Brian, who had managed to obey his master's commands to the extent of not following him, but who had not been able to go home without him. The clean frostiness of the air upon the hilltop was such a relief after the hot

odors of Jerry Gibbs' cottage, that Anthony could not forbear stopping for a moment, sitting down upon his heels, close to the friendly tree trunk. Brian sat down beside him, pushing as near as it was possible to come, shivering a little, partly with cold, mostly with mere delight at being there with his adored master.

In the broad stretch of sky above the river, where there was neither tree nor hill nor passing cloud to obscure the view, there was spread out a show of splendid beauty. There was a reddish star high in the heavens and, somewhat below it, a little spot of spangled brilliance formed by a group of tiny stars, elusive when he tried to count them, for they were so little that there seemed to be some that he was "not quite sure whether they were there or not", as he said afterward to Jane when he pointed them out to her. These, he was to learn, were the Pleiades, stars beloved by the romantic of soul since the earliest of days that history records.

As the two sat watching, one last great star came slowly above the horizon. It looked enormous as it hung above the wooded bluff opposite; its color was deep golden, yet every now and again it gave off sparkles of green, red and orange. This was one which he knew, having heard its name from Matthew Ballantine.

"That is Sirius," he informed his companion aloud. "It is the Dog Star, Brian, and so it belongs especially to you."

Brian acknowledged the information by touching a

cold, wet nose to Anthony's ear and offering such other expressions of affection as are within the limit of a puppy's capacity.

Overhead, a myriad of brilliant points of light showed through the delicate interlacing of the apple-tree twigs. Anthony sat looking up at them for a long time, with all sorts of thoughts coursing through his mind, which it would have been impossible to put into words. There was something about that high glittering dome that was vaguely comforting, that offered consolation for there being in the world such evil-smelling, ominous places as Jerry Gibbs' house, and such men of harsh determination as Jonathan Jarvis. There was even some solace for that small aching spot within him which was missing Roger so sorely.

Joel Davidson, he was sure, had seen that same majestic procession swing across the sky over the apple tree, had seen Sirius shine in watchful brilliance above the hill through all of that winter of desperate hardship. Anthony was stumbling upon the fact of the eternal companionship of stars; he was vaguely absorbing a divine beauty which was almost too great for his heart to hold.

With a noiseless sweep of wings, a big bird came fluttering down to perch upon the apple tree. Brian, looking up curiously, called Anthony's attention to the solemn brown owl who sat staring down at them, as though wishing that they would depart and permit the shy little meadow mice to come creeping up beneath the tree.

He got up at last, feeling happier, very deep within himself, than he had been for some time. The dread of the future, which he had tried so hard to put from his mind, seemed less insistent now. He was thinking that perhaps "things may turn out better than we think", and, his heart being lighter and his heels feeling very light indeed, he raced with Brian down the hill.

He heard footsteps coming along the rustling pathway of the tiny woodland. A tall figure, only faintly discernible in the dark, came hastening out from the obscurity of the trees. A lusty voice hailed him across the slope.

"Oh, Anthony," some one called in cheerily welcome tones.

It was Roger Jarvis.

The boy answered him with a delighted shout.

"Oh, Roger!" he exclaimed and, as he came nearer, "I thought you were never coming back again."

Eager explanations followed on both sides as the two walked down the wood together.

"I got a telegram that my father was ill," Roger told him. "The woman who does our housekeeping sent me word, and I had only just time to catch the train for home. I did not realize until I came back that Mrs. Ballantine had not understood what I was trying to tell her about my going."

"And is he — is he better now?" asked Anthony. He did not like even to mention the name of Jonathan Jarvis.

"He was better by the time I got there. He had been really very sick for two days and had asked for me. But as he improved, he slipped back into thinking as he had done before, that I had no right to doubt him. It is n't because I — I don't care for him that I can't think as he does. You see that, Anthony, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," Anthony assured him.

"He does n't," returned Roger miserably. "Nothing will make him understand that, even if I do believe differently, I still think a lot of him, just the same. I do think he did wrong to Mr. Ballantine ——" he paused and then went on slowly. "Anthony, I begin to believe, for the first time, that he thinks that he did wrong himself."

"Why?" the other boy asked.

"He seemed less sure of himself, more blindly angry when we even mentioned the question. He kept sending word that he would not see me, but finally I just went up to his room and walked in. He was sitting up in a chair, looking paler and thinner; he had changed in the month I had been away, so our housekeeper tells me, changed even before he was ill. He would hardly answer me at first; then he got stirred up, and said a great deal. He said some things about Mr. Ballantine that I — I could n't quite stand for, Anthony. He asked me if I wanted to go on working for him, and I said yes. So he told me that the sooner I went back, the better, and I came away."

They were out of the wood now, and walking down

the street. Roger pondered deeply as he went along, and gave his final opinion.

"I think that if my father were sure that he did right, he could afford to forgive me for doubting him. It is to help keep up his own belief that he keeps on with the quarrel with me. Just the same, I am thankful I went home, even for a day. There were things that we both felt and did n't say, that makes me glad that I have seen him."

They had reached the gray house, previously announced by Brian, and were rapturously greeted on the doorstep by Jane. She had been in great terror over the safety of Anthony and, when she clasped the returned Belinda, she seemed scarcely able to believe that her treasure had been restored to her.

The next Monday morning, as Anthony walked to school, he saw Roger once more at work on the building in Eastman Square. He observed that his friend was setting himself to his labor with new vigor, as though some problem or some doubt had been settled within himself; so that he could go about his task with an undivided mind. It was plain that Roger had ceased to look back toward the possibility of another sort of life, that he now had his courage girded to go forward with what he had undertaken. Anthony walked slowly, hoping that the older boy would have time to speak to him. But as he came close, he saw that his friend's attention was focussed on something quite different.

The big laborer, John Wythe, had shouldered into

Roger's way, as he so often did, and was ordering him to make room and "get your clumsy self out-a-here", as was his frequent fashion. Roger very deliberately laid down his hammer, set his back against a timber and said:

"One of two things has to happen. You will have to let me alone from this time on, or else you will have to fight me."

The man seemed quite taken aback.

"Fight you!" he repeated. "Why, you ain't but half my size!"

"Is that why you are always bullying me?" Roger asked scornfully. "Well, size or no size, what you have been doing is going to stop."

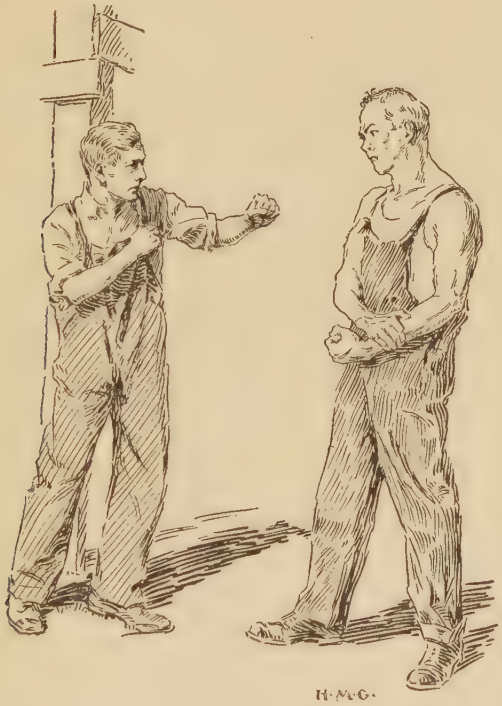
He stood up, facing the other without flinching. He was nearly as tall as his adversary, but immeasurably slimmer and lighter. Hardly any excess of skill in boxing on his part could equalize that difference in brawn and muscle. The man fumed, threatened — and hesitated. Roger took off his coat.

"I 'll not stand one hour longer for what you have been doing and saying," he declared, and repeated what he had said before, "Either let me alone or fight me."

John Wythe took off his coat also, revealing a great arm like the shaft of a steam hammer. He came striding up to Roger; then, since the boy did not fall back before his blustering approach, he suddenly stood still. Like all bullies, he had no real courage, only a great show of swaggering bravado. Anthony could see how,

in the face of Roger's undaunted firmness, the pretence of fierceness oozed, little by little, out of the big man.

"I guess I 'll have to leave you alone," he finally said sheepishly, "because I 'm not going to fight you. Anyways, not to-day."



He put on his coat and went back to his work while Roger once more took up his own. His back was turned to the street, so that he had not seen Anthony, who now walked on. The younger boy observed that

Nels Nelson, the foreman, was hovering within remote earshot of the conversation. Although he seemed to be much occupied with studying a blueprint, it was possible that he was listening for the outcome of the altercation. He was close to the fence, and grinned across it at Anthony as he passed.

"John vould have me to fight, if he laid one finger on that boy," he said.

To fight the big Swede would be a task for which no man would have much taste; certainly it would offer no pleasures to John Wythe.

Nels added, "It is goot that the boy learn about men; he vill handle them vell some day."

As Anthony continued on his way, he could hear the ringing of Roger's hammer, and thought that he could detect a new note in the energy of its blows. It was as though the one who wielded it had put a certain crisis behind him, had closed one chapter of his experience and was setting his face toward the next one.

CHAPTER IX

THE ROSE OF KILLARNEY

IT was a stormy Saturday afternoon. Jane and Anthony were watching Matthew Ballantine, who was established at the table in their small sitting room tinkering with the works of the big clock. Roger, Mr. Ballantine and Anthony had, amongst them, carried down the tall clock case from the garret and, after Nora had polished it, had set it up in the hall. It added a surprisingly homelike look to that formerly bare place. Now Mr. Ballantine had spread out all the wheels, weights, cords and pulleys, upon the table, had cleaned the dust and cobwebs from the vital parts of the clock, and was slowly setting it in order so that it would run once more. On his desk in his shop were piled up plans and specifications calling for many thousands of dollars' worth of building; but he had put them aside and, as he said, was giving himself a thorough rest by rendering first aid to the mechanism of the long disused grandfather's clock. Roger had gone back to the office to finish some special work of his own; but Anthony and Jane were crowded close on each side of Mr. Ballantine, watching every move of his able fingers.

Outside, a heavy white snow was beating against the window, driven by a chill winter wind. The autumn had passed and the cold weather was now

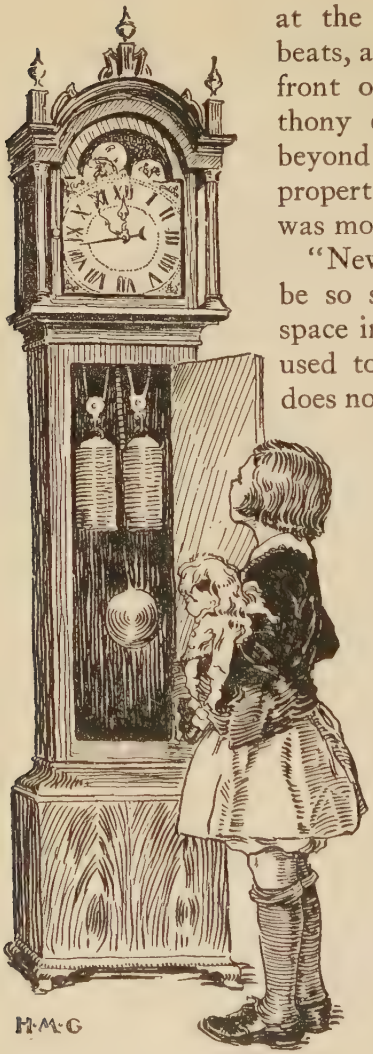
thoroughly upon them. Every day Nora and Anthony struggled with the varying moods of the furnace with which the house had been equipped at some time in the prehistoric period of furnace development. It sent far more smoke than heat into the house and seemed always to be crying aloud for coal. Such outlying regions as the halls and bedrooms upstairs were bitterly cold; but there were portions of the house that could, with infinite labor, be kept comparatively warm. Anthony grew very weary of spending unrewarded effort upon such an ungrateful object, and found the task of carrying coal and cleaning out ashes as dreary a one as any he had ever faced.

He was a boy of unquenchable appetite in the matter of reading and once, when in search of something new, he had stumbled into the midst of an essay by a "clever, funny man named Chesterton", as he told Jane. The essay was upon man's use of fire; and in it the author suggested that the furnace of modern times might be considered the lurking place of a captive dragon, imprisoned there to serve his master by keeping him warm. This pleasant fancy appealed greatly to Anthony and Jane, so that they fell to pretending that the dragon Fafnir, the arch enemy of Anthony's hero Sigurd, had been captured and caged in the cavernous depths of the big heater, to serve the inmates of the house. They and Nora had long talks as to the best methods of feeding the ravenous monster and of forcing him to submit to their will. It was lamentably true that, in spite of the appalling amount of coal which the creature de-

voured, he proved himself a sullen captive and refused, flatly and very often, to obey their commands.

Jane had somewhat dreaded the approach of winter, and had said often that she wished that the mild, sunny days would last forever. But the dull gray weather of November had come on abruptly, with nothing left but the golden memory of earlier autumn. Here and there on the smooth cement sidewalks would be stamped the likeness of an oak or maple leaf, trodden under foot and leaving its imprint of graceful outline and delicate veining pictured on the concrete. Jane loved to count these treasured souvenirs of a brighter season and was filled with regret when the first driving snows washed them away. She was less occupied, to-day, than was Anthony in watching the intricate arrangement of pulleys and balance wheels. She was looking often out of the window, although the heavily falling snow made it impossible even to see Mr. Thrale's house next door.

Mr. Thrale had frankly welcomed the first snowstorm, since it put an end to his reluctant activities in the garden. It was brought to his attention, however, by his unsympathetic doctor, that snow shoveling was an excellent form of exercise and was the logical substitute in winter time for gardening. He could be seen, often, wrapped in a large fur coat, and armed with the most modern and scientific of snow shovels, toiling his way through the drifts, which, so he said, piled themselves with perverse intention across his walk and that of no one else. He and Anthony often met each other



at the end of their respective beats, as they cleared the way in front of the two houses. Anthony often went many yards beyond the boundary of their property, for which Mr. Thrale was most appreciatively grateful.

"Newton often tells me not to be so slow about cleaning the space in front of the garage," he used to say to Anthony. "He does not like it if there are drifts in the way of backing out his car."

Newton Thrale was never observed to lay hand upon the snow shovel himself; his life was far too greatly filled with important engagements for any such occupation. Anthony and Mr. Thrale would often stand talking for a few minutes when each had come to the end of his allotted space. Both would be ruddy with cold, with their whole bodies glowing from the exercise;

their breath would go up like white steam into the cold air as they stood discussing ways and means for efficient snow shoveling.

"I would save more labor if I could do it so and so," Mr. Thrale would say and then remembering himself sadly would add, "But it is for the sake of the labor that I 'm doing it, is n't it?"

"I really think he begins to like it," Anthony told Jane and Nora, "but it probably will be a long time before he admits that he does, to himself, or to any one else."

Now, at last, Matthew Ballantine had fitted the final wheel into place and, lifting the whole complicated structure of interior workings, set them within the big clock. At the top of the dial a red-cheeked portrait of the sun traveled from one side to the other to indicate the days of the month and the phases of the moon. There were roses and gilded flourishes painted about the lower portions of the face, giving the whole clock a pleasant and benign expression such as a grandfather's clock should have. They all three waited breathless while Matthew Ballantine wound up the two big weights. In a moment the slow, dignified tick began to sound through the hall.

"What time is it, Anthony?" asked Mr. Ballantine. "We will set it by your watch."

Anthony pulled out his timepiece and made a brief calculation.

"It loses five minutes a day," he computed aloud, "so I set it ten minutes ahead yesterday. That would

make it five minutes fast now, so I believe it is just about a quarter past three."

When they had gone upstairs to fetch down the big clock, Matthew Ballantine had rummaged about and unearthed another treasure which Jane and Anthony had seen but had not investigated, for they had not known what it could be. It was a square glass box, containing a mystifying arrangement of cylinders and wheels, but with no resemblance to a clock or any such mechanism. Upon this Mr. Ballantine now set to work, with kerosene and oil from the sewing-machine can, and with a general loosening of some wheels and a tightening of others. He would not tell them, even yet, what the odd mechanism would prove to be; he only smiled to himself at their questions and went on setting it in order.

"Now," he said finally, "we have it ready to run. Call Nora in; I know she will be pleased to see what we have found."

Nora came in from the kitchen and stood in the doorway while Matthew Ballantine pushed a small handle and closed down the glass cover of the box. There was a soft whirring of wheels; the cylinder began to revolve, and in a moment a faint, tuneful "pinkle-pinkle-pinkle" came from the interior.

"A music box!" declared Nora. "I have n't heard one since I was ten years old. And as for that tune, it is the "Rose of Killarney" that my mother used to sing when she rocked me to sleep."

Jane was enchanted with the new treasure.

"I do think, Mr. Ballantine," she declared, "that there is no instrument in the world that you can't play on!"

Matthew Ballantine laughed.

"There is no skill needed to play on this," he assured her. "Look, I will show you just how to run it, and you shall have it for your very own."

It was time now for him to return to his more practical labors; so he put away his tools, put on his big coat, and prepared to sally forth into the snow.

"I am going with you," said Anthony, "I want to see how deep it is getting to be."

The two set out, ducking their heads into the driving storm, trudging laboriously through the sticky snow, which was now some inches deep. It was magnificent material for snowballs, of which Anthony manufactured a great number and tried his markmanship on the trunks of trees and the pickets of fences as they tramped along.

He walked down Jefferson Street as far as Mr. Ballantine's shop, and put his head, for a moment, inside the door to give greeting to Roger, who was busy at the long table. Roger would have had him come in to see how he was progressing with something which he was drawing; but Anthony was so plastered with snow that he felt he had better remain outside.

Matthew Ballantine was standing over the table to inspect the work. Anthony, as he closed the door, heard Mr. Ballantine say:

"Be sure to make space in the hall, just right for a grandfather's clock."

Anthony trudged away, but did not go straight home, for he enjoyed being out in the white snow-filled air, and liked to watch how the drifts were growing up in the fence corners.

He encountered very few people in the storm-swept streets; but presently he was joined by a man who came out of the office building which he was just passing. This was Mr. William Watson, the real estate agent, with whom he had some small acquaintance, because he was their landlord and because it was with him that Anthony had had occasion to discuss the shortcomings of the unobliging Fafnir.

"Well, Anthony," Mr. Watson greeted him, "there are n't many out to-day that have any excuse for staying in. How are things going, up at your house?"

"Pretty well," replied Anthony cheerfully, "the roof does n't leak any more and we are learning how to get ahead of the furnace."

"By the way," remarked Mr. Watson, "I wrote to your guardian a day or two ago about something that Nora ought to know too. I have found somebody to take the old house off my hands at last. There is a man who wants to buy it and tear it down to make room for a new building on that corner. I have asked Mr. Jarvis if he and Nora and the rest of you would be willing to give up the place, although Mr. Jarvis took it for a year, and signed a lease that would hold it that long. Of course if he won't do it, he won't; I know Jonathan Jarvis is a man set in his intentions. But we would give him a refund of two months' rent, if he would

cancel the lease and let us have possession. Do you think he would, Anthony?"

"He -- he might," faltered Anthony. The whole snowy street seemed suddenly to whirl about him, so desperate was the news which Mr. Bill Watson had dropped in such casual fashion. Give up the lease! It was only by Nora's reminding Mr. Jarvis of that bargain that their household had been kept together! It was the very slender defense which had held them safe against Mr. Jarvis' plans. And now, even that protection was swept away! The disaster of which he had not allowed himself to think was fairly upon them!

He scarcely knew when Mr. Watson said something about an errand and turned aside into a doorway. He struggled along, the snow beating down upon him, his eyes blind to everything in the white world round about. His only thought was how to break this direful news to Nora. And how in the world could they ever tell Jane?

He came up the steep steps to his own front door, stamped off the snow and went in. Jane was sitting by the fire, warm and cozy and happy, with Brian, in peaceful content, asleep on the hearth rug beside her. She had the music box upon her knees and was delightedly playing one tune after another. For long afterward it seemed to Anthony that the gay, tinkling little music playing the "Rose of Killarney" stood in his memory for black and hopeless tragedy.

The door at the end of the hall opened quietly and Nora came in from the kitchen. From one look at her

face Anthony was aware that she, also, had news of what was about to happen.

"Come in this way," she said to him gently, "and do not say anything to Jane. I have a telegram. He will be coming to-morrow."

He followed her to the kitchen, sat down by the table, and tried to read the yellow paper which she spread out before him. But the words seemed to dance before his eyes. He could only make out vaguely that Mr. Jarvis was sending them word of there being a request that they give up the house, and that he would arrive in Winstead at noon next day, "to make arrangements."

It is a strange feeling to have time drag and yet go by too fast. It seemed to Anthony that through that afternoon and evening, every hour stretched for the span of a week. Yet this dread of what to-morrow would bring made the next day come all too quickly. The evening passed; Jane chattered cheerfully, the only light-hearted person in the house. Once or twice she looked inquiringly at her brother and at Nora, as though she realized that something was amiss with them; but since neither volunteered any explanation, she went on with her gay imaginings. She played all the tunes of the music box through to Belinda and then, with her new treasure under one arm and Belinda under the other, she went sleepily and happily up to bed.

It must have snowed the whole of the night, for the next morning the fall was knee-deep, a solid blanket of

glittering white that covered everything. The skies had cleared, and the sun had come out upon a clean and sparkling world. Anthony was glad that there was so great a task before him in the clearing of the walks; he was grateful for some work which would absorb his restless energies. He had made some headway even before breakfast; later, he advanced down the street like an animated snowplow, with Brian dashing about in the drifts ahead of him. He did not stop at the corner of his own fence; but advanced far into the territory of Mr. Thrale.

"I might as well finish, when I have gone all this way," he told himself, and forthwith cleared the walk to its end across the whole front of the neighboring grounds. He could not help feeling better and more cheerful when he had accomplished all this. It seemed more and more possible that Mr. Jarvis might fail to come, or that, even if he did arrive, he might be found to have given up his threatened purpose.

Mr. Thrale came out, girded for a gigantic struggle, and viewed with beaming countenance the extent of Anthony's activities.

"I call that a tremendous deed done," he said delightedly. "You can't think how I have dreaded shoveling all that snow. You are a wonderfully kind neighbor."

"I was n't kind," blurted out Anthony; "Mr. Jarvis is coming to-day and I had to have something else to think about." Then, feeling that in his distress he had been unwisely frank he added, "Now we will do the

walk up to the house. If you begin at the steps, I will start at the gate, and we will meet in the middle."

The spot at which their efforts met was not the mathematical center, for Anthony was a far more effective worker than Mr. Thrale; but the walk was quickly shoveled clean and even the space before the garage was finally cleared to the satisfaction of Newton, who stood on the back steps directing operations.

"You are n't going to do any motoring with the snow as deep as this?" said Mr. Thrale.

"I 'll have to get the car out, sure, this afternoon," Newton said. "Got a date in Mapletown that I can't miss for any bad roads. So shovel away. Call off your clumsy dog, Anthony; he 's getting snow on my trousers."

Anthony went in, feeling cheered, and tingling with energy. But something in the atmosphere of the house dashed his spirits the moment he went in, and brought all his soaring hopes to the ground. It was as though some suggestion of Mr. Jarvis' character pervaded the place which he had chosen, and that its very gloominess gave hint of how little could be expected from him.

Nora was in the kitchen, preparing dinner. Hither

Anthony went to seek her out. She looked white and worn, as though she had not slept; but her eyes met his with steady courage.

"The waiting beforehand is the worst of any bad time," she said to him. "It won't be very long now."

"Nora," he cried desperately, "don't let him take us away."

"I won't, Anthony," she said. "Everything I have is yours and Jane's: my heart, body and strength; surely that should be enough to hold against anything."

"Perhaps the snow will keep him," Anthony hoped in his extremity. "He has been ill lately; maybe he can't come!"

"It was nearly two months ago he was ill," she reminded him, "and you know that we have heard since that he is quite well again. I hear the trains running, the snow has n't stopped them. No, it will be better that he should come, and have it over."

The church bell, ringing cheerily across the snow-buried town for Sunday School, made a diversion here and called Anthony and Jane to make haste. The boy went through the rest of the morning in a daze, and was so absent-minded when any one spoke to him, that more than one person asked him point-blank what was the matter. He responded abruptly, "Nothing," and was mercifully not troubled by further questioning.

Noontime came, a dragging half hour to allow for a late train; then arrived Ned Wade's taxi, rattling and jolting to its stop before their gateway. No, there could be no longer any hope of reprieve; Mr. Jarvis

was getting out. He looked thinner, grayer and more unbending than ever. Anthony, urged by duty — and Nora — went out to the gate to meet him.

"Had a good trip, Jonathan?" Ned Wade was asking with unquenchable cordiality.

"No, the journey over this line is abominable," returned Mr. Jarvis. "Well, thank fortune, it 's the last time."

He walked into the house with Anthony behind him.

There followed a wretched dinner, when Nora set her most approved dishes upon the table, to have them taste like dust and ashes, at least to the boy and girl. No person so sensitive as Jane could, by this time, fail to note that something was terribly wrong. She sat at the foot of the table, opposite Mr. Jarvis as was proper for the young lady of the house; but she scarcely dared to look up, so fearful was she of meeting his eyes. She did not speak at all; so that the burden of the conversation fell upon Anthony. It was a burden which dropped heavily to the ground by the time dinner was halfway through. Mr. Jarvis seemed wrapped in thoughts of his own, and he answered so tersely any remark that was addressed to him, that at last the boy abandoned the attempt and let the meal end in silence. The moment they arose from the table, Jane fled away into the kitchen and was seen no more.

"Send Nora in to the sitting room to speak to me," Mr. Jarvis directed Anthony. "I have some — some business to talk over with her, and it must be in private."

He cleared his throat nervously. Evidently he himself did not regard the coming interview quite calmly. He walked away into the small room next the front door, and sat down by the fire.

Nora came through the hall, very erect and steady, ready to do battle for her dear ones. She tried to give Anthony a reassuring smile as she passed; but he could see that the effort was a very great one and not wholly successful.

"How I wish that I could go with her," he thought, as the door closed; but definite orders had been given him to stay outside.

For a long hour he sat by the window, listening to the sonorous tick of the tall clock and the hum of voices behind the closed door. Once he heard an impatient exclamation from Mr. Jarvis, once a sharp protest from Nora, although the words of both were indistinguishable. The waiting seemed intolerable. Anthony wished Brian were with him; but the dog had taken even more remote refuge than Jane, from the presence of Mr. Jarvis.

His sister came in at last and stood close by him. She did not ask any questions, although there was mute distress and wonder in her eyes. She brought out the music box and set it upon the table. Mr. Ballantine had showed her how to subdue its tone by only half-winding it, so now it was the veriest ghost of a tinkle which she permitted to come from it. Since it seemed to comfort her, Anthony did not protest, but sat listening with only a small fraction of his mind to the thin

melodies of long-forgotten popularity. Jane played them all through and began on the first one again, as they sat waiting.

At last the door opened and the voices could be heard clearly. Anthony rushed into the hall and saw that the two were standing in the doorway.

"—— you quite forget that I have legal rights and you have none," Mr. Jarvis was saying. "And I think you even forget yourself and your place, in the manner with which you speak to me."

Nora passed the boy in the hall without a word. She was white-lipped; and her face looked as though it were cut out of stone. She scarcely seemed to see him as she went into the kitchen, closing the door behind her. The boy advanced into the room where Mr. Jarvis had gone back to stand before the fire.

"I suppose you know what we have been discussing," his guardian said. He looked flustered and uneasy, as though he had not fared quite happily in the interview. "I hope," he went on, "that you will not prove as obstinate as this impudent young woman who has had charge of your household too long. It is high time a change was made. You and Jane are bound to agree to the arrangements which I have made."

"No," cried Anthony, in sudden defiance that astonished even himself. "You have no right to take us away. We belong together; we will stay together, whatever you say. We won't go, ever — ever."

And he dashed from the room, leaving the astonished Mr. Jarvis to stare after him.

He raced through the hall; but restrained his impetuosity at the kitchen door, opened it very softly and went in. Nora was sitting beside the table, with her arm upon it and her head upon her arm. She did not move until he came close and spoke her name.

She lifted her face and showed it gray and lifeless, with a grief that was too great for tears or words.

"I 'm beaten, Anthony," she said dully. "He knows so much, and I know so little. That is where he is too strong for me. Not all the work and care and love that I can give you will out-balance some blind law or other. He talks about the rights he has; he says some words on a piece of paper make you his and not mine. There is nothing we can do."

For a moment he could think of nothing to say. The whole house was silent; Jane had stopped her music box at last, and the only sound was the measured ticking of the big clock in the hall.

"There must be something to do," Anthony finally returned desperately. "It can't — it simply can't be that anything so wrong is — is right. I am going to talk to Mr. Ballantine. Surely he can help us some way. And he is n't afraid of Mr. Jarvis."

He went to the door of the dining room. "Jane," he said.

She came in at once, her eyes wide with unhappy questioning, but she said nothing. She climbed upon Nora's lap and put her arms about the girl's neck. That some one needed comforting was far more important in Jane's eyes than the question of what was the

matter. She was whispering endearments into Nora's ear as Anthony called Brian and went out.

The sun had gone behind heavy clouds and the air was raw and cold. Anthony strode through the snow, wondering just what he should say to Matthew Ballantine, speculating as to just what could be done. Surely, oh, surely, Mr. Ballantine could do something. He opened the door of the shop, knowing that his friend was often there on Sunday afternoons, reading comfortably by the fire from one or another of those books of poetry which filled his shelves. It was upon one of those shelves that Anthony had discovered Sigurd the Volsung.

But to-day it was only Roger who was there to greet him. Matthew Ballantine had gone out with his car; he had an errand at Mark Lyman's. He had started two hours before, so that he ought to be back in no very great length of time. Roger urged Anthony to wait, but the boy was too restless to stop long in any place.

"What is the matter, Anthony; can't you tell me?" asked Roger anxiously, but the other silently shook his head. Jonathan Jarvis was Roger's father; and Anthony felt that he could not tell his son what that father had done — at least he could not tell him now. With scarcely another word he went forth again into the snow.

He did not go to the front door of the tall gray house; he felt that to speak to his guardian at that moment was more than he could endure. Skirting the garden,

he reached the back door and called Jane to come out for a moment.

"Mr. Ballantine will be coming home from Mark Lyman's along the road below Apple Creek Hill," he said. "We are going to walk out to meet him, Brian and I."

Jane nodded. She seemed to understand Anthony's restless spirit, which could not at that moment be held within four walls.

"He 's sitting down to read," she remarked, referring to Mr. Jarvis. "He can't go away again until late to-night. Nora has gone upstairs. Don't be too long, Anthony."

He reflected, as he turned away, that Jane was showing more courage than the rest of them. She was facing steadily a trouble whose nature she did not know; yet with her vivid imagination she must be conjuring up all sorts of direful possibilities. Should he go back and tell her just what was wrong? No, he would not be able to find the words.

As he went forth again, he had a moment of hope on recalling that Newton Thrale had spoken, that morning, of an expedition to Mapletown. His way would lead out along the road that lay below Apple Creek Hill and, although the last thing in the world that Anthony would like to do was to ask a favor of Newton, there was a possibility that the bigger boy could take him in his car. But he saw, as he passed, that the Thrale's garage was empty and that Newton had already departed to keep his engagement. There was no use in taking the

other route over the pasture and past the cabin, since he would be apt to miss Matthew Ballantine, returning by the road. There was nothing to do but to set out for the long tramp along the side of the river.

The snow was deeper than he had thought, even in the more sheltered places. He was surprised, also, to see only a few wheel tracks and to observe that no car passed him as he walked first one mile and then another. Even Brian finally became subdued by the distance that they had trudged, by the raw cold of the weather, and by the evident depression of his master. They trudged along through the snow, a dejected boy and a bedraggled dog. Anthony now felt so weary, both in body and mind, that he had ceased to think much even of Mr. Jarvis and had his whole thought centered upon the hope of presently meeting Mr. Ballantine.

He came at last to a point where the walking was difficult, there being a stretch of loose stone beneath the soft snow. And after a quarter mile of that unpleasant footing, he arrived at a flimsy barrier set up across the road with the sign "Detour" upon its farther side. This, then, was why there had been no passing upon the highway; this was why Matthew Ballantine must have gone back by some other road; so that Anthony and Brian had missed him after all. There was nothing to do but to turn about and march wearily back again. His head, his feet, and his heart all seemed to be of such unbearable weight that he felt scarcely able to struggle along. It was snowing again,

with icy flakes that blew into his face, borne by a rising wind.

Meanwhile, in the gloomy gray house, the time passed slowly and the afternoon wore towards its end. Nora and Jane had a long talk in the kitchen, wherein Jane learned, at last, what was the purpose of Mr. Jarvis' coming. She seemed to have little thought of what it would mean to herself, to have their small household swept so wide apart. She could only speak of how Anthony and Nora must have worried, and how brave Nora had been to try to withstand Mr. Jarvis.

"There must be a way somehow," she declared with youthful hopefulness. "It is n't possible — I won't believe that he would do such a thing as that to us."

That was what Anthony had also said; but his attitude and Jane's were the opposite of what an older person's judgment could see. Nora's attempt to reason and to argue with Mr. Jarvis had proved so unavailing in the face of the hard legal facts which he had produced, that it seemed there was no hope in any direction. But presently, as the time passed, such grief and terror as Mr. Jarvis' plan had inspired was lost in greater anxiety over the non-appearance of Anthony.

"Perhaps he did n't find Mr. Ballantine," said Jane, "and has gone to Mr. Thrale instead. Maybe he is over there, quite near us and all safe."

"You had better run over to Mr. Thrale's house and ask," replied Nora. "As you say, it is quite likely that he is there."

Jane wrapped herself up warmly and plowed through the snow by the shortest way to Mr. Thrale's front door. Newton had just come in from the garage, with his big fur coat all powdered with white. His father had waited in the hall to speak to him. Newton was removing his coat leisurely, and talking of a slight misadventure which he had met with upon the road.

"It might almost have been a nasty accident," he was saying, "for the snow was coming down so thick that I could hardly see. I had driven through the bars that marked the detour before I knew it; so then I thought I might as well go on. There was a fellow with a dog, tramping along, right in the middle of the road. He hardly seemed to notice me, and barely turned out when I honked; but the dog jumped right into my way and I hit him. I don't think I touched the fellow at all. Anyway, when I looked back, I saw him run across and stoop over the dog; so I knew he was all right. I did n't want to stop and be bawled out by somebody, when I had a girl in the car; so I just went on."

"When was that?" asked Mr. Thrale sharply. "Did this just happen?"

"Oh, no," returned Newton, "it must have been quite two hours ago. I took Gladys home and have been fooling around there for a while since. Say, kid, what 's the matter?"

Jane had uttered some sound of terror; it was scarcely a word. The two stood staring at her until she managed to cry out:

"Anthony was walking on the Apple Creek Road, Anthony and Brian. And he has n't come back!"

Without further words, she turned to run homeward, stumbling in the snow in her desperate haste to reach her own door.

CHAPTER X

HALF A KINGDOM

ANTHONY, walking heavily and wearily, with Brian at his heels, had been scarcely conscious of the oncoming of the car behind him. The lights had been shrouded in the falling snow, so that he did not know how close they had come until he heard the roar of the engine almost in his ears. Like most drivers of his type, Newton had taken for granted that every one would get out of the way at the command of his horn; and he had never slackened speed or turned aside. Brian, in some unreasoning effort to drive back this monster which threatened his master, had flung himself furiously in the path of the car. This attack had made Newton swerve a little, so that he almost missed Anthony, but struck the dog with the sound of a sickening blow.

Anthony had not escaped entirely. The big hub cap had grazed his knee; but of that he took little notice, as he darted across the road to where Brian had been thrown by the impact of the wheels. The dog lay limp in the snow; it seemed at first that he had been killed instantly. But as the boy knelt down beside him and felt of him to try to discover just where he had been injured, he realized that the puppy's heart was still beating with a faint and irregular pulse; that at least, Brian was as yet alive. Anthony stood up

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Anthony, with Brian at his heels, had been scarcely conscious of the oncoming car.

and looked desperately about him. There was no sign of any human being near, and no hope that any one might pass that way. If he left Brian there in the snowdrift, to go for help, what little life still remained in the dog would soon be extinguished by the bitter cold and the falling snow. Indeed, to leave him was never for a moment in his thoughts. He picked him up, a heavy and unwieldy armful, and staggered forward along the road.

It was only then that he became conscious of the pain in his knee. It grew and grew with every step, until his whole body seemed to be a single red-hot agony. His manful steps grew shorter and more wavering; his head swam; the weight of Brian in his arms seemed to increase to gigantic proportions. Even in his dimmest confused thoughts, it never occured to him to put down his burden and go forward alone. He still believed that he was making brave progress when his faltering steps had come almost to a standstill; he still felt that he was staggering onward when he stumbled, pitched face forward, and lay still in the snow.

Far away, from the direction of the town, a black moving dot was advancing along the road. The very fact that the way was closed to usual traffic made this highroad the more desirable to the wayfarer who was approaching so rapidly. Once or twice Jerry Gibbs looked back over his shoulder, to make sure that as yet no one was following him. There had been trouble in the place that he had left, trouble of an ugly kind;

and Jerry Gibbs was taking his hasty way out of Winstead with the knowledge that he would never dare to set foot within it again.

The wind and the drifting snow were at his back, so that he could see farther ahead than Anthony had been able to do. He stopped, once, to try to get a clearer glimpse of what had seemed to be somebody coming toward him up the road. Apparently, he had been mistaken, for there was now no sign of any person advancing along that white drifted way.

Anthony, lying as he had fallen, was not yet quite unconscious. He was so utterly exhausted as to be unable to move; but he had a vague knowledge of what was going on about him. He heard footsteps and wondered dimly whether or not the person would go by without noticing him and Brian lying there helpless. He made an effort to call out, but succeeded only in producing a faint groan. Then he became aware that whoever it was had stopped and was stooping over him. He felt a groping hand touch him. It did not attempt to lift him up, but began cautiously feeling for his pockets, — first one, then another. The newcomer even knelt down in the snow, unbuttoned the boy's coat and began exploring his jacket within. It was plain that the first thought of this passing stranger was robbery and not help for a fallen traveler.

The investigating fingers discovered something in an inner pocket and drew it forth. There was a brief pause as the man seemed to make a hollow of his hands, to strike a match and inspect the prize. There was a

sputter as the match went out in the snow; there was the sound of an astounded exclamation.

"Bless me! If it ain't the fellow with the watch!"

He lifted Anthony into a sitting posture with his arm about him and with the boy's back against the wind.

"What happened to you?" he said.

With enormous difficulty and in a voice which seemed to himself to sound from a great way off, Anthony replied.

"Car hit me," he managed to say.

Jerry Gibbs appeared to be pondering.

"I can't take you back to town," he said slowly. "I never was too popular there, and now things have happened that I can't show my face in that place ever again. And I can't get back to my own house; they will be looking for me there soon enough, and I have to make a clean get-away. But if you think you can stand it, I can carry you up the hill to that cabin in the pasture. You will keep from freezing there, and folks will be out looking for you — or else looking for me — and they will find you, before morning. Will that do?"

Faintly, Anthony nodded.

"Brian — too," he insisted.

The man hesitated.

"I have n't much time," he began, and then altered his tone. "Yes, I 've got a dog of my own; I know how it is. I will come back for the pup after I have got you there. It 's lucky dogs is tough."

He slung Anthony over his shoulder as though he had been a sack of oats, and began the climb upward. He seemed to know the face of that hillside with long familiarity, for he made his way unerringly toward the top. He must have been a man of extraordinary strength to carry a helpless burden so far. He was panting heavily by the time he had reached the open pasture and had, more than once, been forced to put the boy down and rest for a moment. Anthony never remembered his sensations during that upward struggle; he had only recalled afterward the moment when Jerry Gibbs said cheerfully but breathlessly:

"Here we are," and, shouldering open the door of the

cabin, carried him inside and laid him upon the floor.

He struck a match to look about him, saw the piled firewood at the door of the storeroom and fetched an armful quickly to lay upon the hearth. With a bunch of dry bark and another spluttering match, he kindled the fire that crept slowly along a dead branch of apple wood.

Anthony was watching him uneasily.

"You won't forget Brian," he managed to remind him.

"No," answered Jerry Gibbs, "but this place is as cold as a tomb. I can't leave you without a spark of fire."

He went out of the door at last; and, so it seemed to Anthony, hours and hours went by before he returned. This time he was carrying the inert Brian, who was put down beside the hearth where the fire had burned up into a cheerful blaze. He ran skilful hands over the injured dog and spoke his verdict.

"He has got some ribs broken," he said, "and he has been knocked on the head; but he is surely still alive. He might pull through if help comes along soon."

He straightened up and stood looking at the two. Anthony, reviving in the warmth, had struggled up to his elbow and was regarding him dizzily.

"I don't understand just how you came to find us," he was attempting to say.

"Never you mind that," returned Jerry Gibbs. "I don't know but this is the last time you will ever

see me, unless they catch me and take me back. If anybody asks you which way Jerry Gibbs has gone, you won't know, will you?"

Anthony shook his head.

"No," he said. "They ought to let you go free after what you have done for us."

"They are not so kind as you think, sheriffs and such like," responded Jerry. "Well, so long. I am not sure but you two are in as bad a way as I am."

He went out, closing the door behind him. The cabin was completely still save for the crackling of the fire and the rattle of the icy snow against the windows.

Anthony lay down again and remained quiet for a long time. The throbbing ache in his knee still seemed to fill his whole being; he was still so worn out as to have no inclination to move. He seemed to fall into some sort of stupor, for it was certain that he knew nothing for the next hour that passed. But presently he was aroused by a faint sound, a moan from the injured dog. It pierced Anthony's inert consciousness and brought him back; although it had seemed that he was a thousand miles away.

He tried to get up, found that he could not stand, and toppled to the floor with an agonized wrench of the damaged knee. Very painfully he raised himself a little and crawled across the intervening space to where Brian lay. The dog was twitching and moving his head aimlessly; he moaned louder, and the sound of his pain seemed to tear Anthony's heart. He could do nothing for him; but he took the puppy's head into

his lap, soothed and talked to him, and caressed his silky ears. Somewhere, in his pain-filled daze, Brian seemed to feel the nearness of that master who was his whole world. He ceased twitching and moaning, and Anthony heard the faintest ghost of a different sound, the dog's weak attempt to beat with his tail upon the floor.

He believed that Brian was dying and, beyond that stabbing

thought, he had no other. His mind could not reach outside the narrow circle of pain, cold, and anguished apprehension. He altered his position a little so that the dog might lie more comfortably against his knee. The effort sent a lightning-bolt of agony through him. The puppy whimpered again.

"Brian!" Anthony cried out. "Brian!"

The red dog moved his head, found Anthony's hand and, with a warm pink tongue, licked it feebly. Then he lay still, until, after a long minute, there came that faint sound again, the soft pat-pat of his tail upon the floor. He opened his eyes and looked up at Anthony with adoring gaze. That glance seemed to say: "Do you think that I could go away from you, when I love you so?"

For an hour or more thereafter, the boy sat clasping Brian close against him, since it was when he was held thus that the puppy whimpered least. Once, and then again, Anthony dragged himself across the floor to fetch more wood for the fire. Each time, the pain he felt was more intense; so that the last attempt left him limp and gasping. He realized that a time would come when he could not reach the fuel piled up in the storeroom. It was of no real use to think about that

moment. The small fire which he had been able to keep burning only half tempered the bitter cold within the cabin; but that was sufficient to keep them alive — for the present.

Brian seemed to breathe a trifle more easily and regularly. Perhaps he was not dying; perhaps the worst danger was passed. What had Jerry Gibbs said — "Dogs is tough." The pain in Anthony's knee diminished a little while he sat so still. Weariness swept over him like a smothering wave. In spite of everything, he nodded, fell partly asleep, and awoke again. Three times his head dropped drowsily forward; but after the third brief snatch of slumber he was suddenly wide awake. Some one was coming through the snow toward the door.

Was it Roger? Was it Matthew Ballantine? He tried to call, and managed a hoarse cry which could hardly have been heard beyond the door. He sat waiting as the footsteps came nearer, struggled heavily through the drifts about the doorstep but pressed forward unafraid. There was a fumbling at the latch, and the door swung inward, bringing with it a dash of wind and flying snow — and Jane.

She closed the door with sturdy effort against the buffeting of the wind. After she had pulled the wooden latch into place, she stood for a moment with her back against it to make certain that it would hold. She stood looking at Anthony and Brian, at the bare cabin and the dwindling fire; but she was so breathless with

her struggle through the storm that she did not attempt to speak.

It was Anthony, indeed, who found words first.

"Where are the others?" he asked.

"There are n't any others," she replied. "I came alone."

"Alone?" he stared at her incredulously. "Through the snow? Across the pasture? Past the wood?"

She nodded at each question. Jane had been known to feel timid about following the path through the bit of woodland even at twilight.

"I was never afraid at all. I could n't think of anything but you and Brian. I knew — somehow I knew just where I would find you."

She advanced into the room and began at once to make herself busy. She brought great quantities of wood from the storeroom and built up the fire until it roared gloriously in the wide chimney. She helped Anthony to settle himself with his back against the wall and with a coat rolled up under his knee. She eased Brian when his master moved, and laid the dog beside him again, when he whimpered with apprehension lest he and Anthony were to be parted.

Hugged under her arm, she had been carrying a thermos bottle, which she opened and set upon the floor.

"Nora was making hot coffee, to be ready when you came, so I filled this and brought it with me," she said.

Neither she nor Anthony had, so far, asked each other any questions, nor would she let him talk until he had

swallowed two cups of the steaming liquid. They made an attempt to administer a dose of the same drink to Brian, but succeeded only in making him choke.

The stimulating heat of the coffee had revived Anthony at once, while the heart-giving warmth of the fire began to restore both his strength and that of Brian. The dog drew a long breath of content, and of his own effort, nestled against the boy. Anthony's mind began to clear; and with its awakening energy came a flood of questioning.

What was happening at home? How had any one allowed her to come alone? Had Matthew Ballantine got back? What was Mr. Jarvis doing?

Jane gave him brief and simple information. Every one was looking for him now. Even the police, who were scouring the neighborhood for Jerry Gibbs, were now searching also for Anthony.

"Jerry Gibbs had a fight with a man and hurt him so that they think he may die. They want to put Jerry in jail until they see whether he does or not. They seem to want pretty much to have him in jail, anyway."

Matthew Ballantine and Roger had come to the door just as Mr. Thrale had arrived with the news that Apple Creek Road had been searched and no trace of Anthony had been found.

"There 'll not be much trace of him anywhere in this snow," Nora had said grimly. Newton Thrale, looking white and shaky, had been with his father. They had gone off together to set further measures on foot and Roger had gone with them. Then Nora had

taken Mr. Ballantine into the little room to talk to Jonathan Jarvis.

"Mr. Ballantine — went in to Mr. Jarvis? But they don't speak to each other!" protested Anthony.

"They are speaking to each other now," returned Jane. "They were all speaking very hard, when I went past the door."

She had attempted, once, to say that she knew where Anthony must be; but Nora had failed to hear her, since it was at that moment that the others had come in. The thought that she would have to go into that room and speak out before Mr. Jarvis had been far too terrifying for Jane, so she had simply slipped away without further words.

"I knew Nora could n't come with me, for she had to be there in case some one found you on the road and brought you home. I just could n't go in to where Mr. Jarvis was, and say that I was starting out to look for you. They all seemed to be very busy telling each other things. Nora was telling something to all of them when I slipped out of the door."

She had been much more afraid of Mr. Jarvis, she explained, than she ever could be of the dark wood. The coffee, boiling forgotten upon the stove, had caught her eye as she went through the kitchen. She had reached down the thermos bottle, filled it, and carried it with her as an afterthought.

"Perhaps I would have dropped it, if I had known I had it," she said. "But I was so busy trying to find the way that I quite forgot it, and found it still under

my arm when I was fumbling to open the door. It seemed to me," she added, "that while I was standing on the doorstep and when the wind stopped blowing for a minute, I saw something red, like a fire, down beyond Apple Creek. But the snow came whirling down again, and I could n't see it any more."

They sat very quietly together after she had given her explanation. Anthony had not the energy for further inquiries and she seemed to feel that there was no more to say. Once more sleepiness began to creep over the boy, the drowsiness of utter exhuastion.

How completely changed the cabin seemed, now that Jane had come. It was full of light and warmth and cheery companionship. It was still bare and dusty, with the increasing storm tearing at the door and rattling the window panes, and with occasional snowflakes dropping down the chimney to perish hissing in the midst of the flame. But, since he and Jane and Brian were all together again, it seemed suddenly that this place was safe and bright and happy — that it was home.

"I wish," he cried, rousing himself, and speaking suddenly and bitterly, "I wish that Mr. Jarvis could never find us!"

Jane was sitting on the bench, which she had drawn close to him. She, too, had evidently been thinking of how safe and peaceful they were at just that moment, and of what unhappy possibilities lay before them when their whereabouts should be discovered.

"Let 's not think about Mr. Jarvis, Anthony," she

said. "Let 's think, instead, what we would do if we could have anything we wanted."

It was a game which they often played, which frequently soared far into the realms of impossible fancy, but which was quite free from any bitterness of disappointment with the reality to which they must return.

"I will tell you what I would do," returned Anthony promptly. "I would take your Belinda to a wonderful doll specialist somewhere, and have him give her another eye just like the one she lost, and new hair, very beautiful and golden. He would make her all over into a lovely new doll with never a crack anywhere."

This was his handsome apology for that moment when he had rudely made fun of Belinda. And he added, "You did n't bring Belinda this time."

Jane chuckled and then shook her head.

"It was too bad weather for Belinda to be out, with her delicate health. And I am not sure that I would have Belinda any different; I seem to love her best just as she is. Now I will tell you what I would do." She drew a long breath in preparation.

"I would take your watch to the finest jeweler in the world, and have it all covered with gold outside and set with diamonds and emeralds and rubies. Then I would have him put new works into it so that it would never lose a second and go without winding for a hundred years."

Her fancies were always apt to fly somewhat higher

than Anthony's since he had a taste for more practical suggestions. Now he also shook his head.

"I believe I like my watch better the way it is," he said. "As long as it goes, I will just keep it without any rubies and diamonds; though it sounds like a wonderful watch, the one that you are telling about. We 'll give that one to Nora."

He reflected for a moment, since it was now his turn for a new fancy.

"I should like," he declared, "to go to a concert or an opera somewhere, and hear the singing lady, the one who gave us Brian. I don't remember her name, but Nora does; she was reading to me out of the newspaper about her. It said that she was giving concerts not very far from here, and how everybody loved to hear her sing!"

"Oh, that would be beautiful," cried Jane. "And we would make Mr. Ballantine go with us; he would love it the most of all. I wish we could take Brian, but he and the singing lady did n't get on very well together."

Brian, hearing his name, managed to acknowledge its mention by a sweep of his tail upon the floor. The effort showed more strength than he had so far been able to produce. Anthony patted his head in delighted relief, while Jane stooped down to stroke one of his white paws.

"Anthony," she asked without looking up, "just how big is half a kingdom?"

He was used to unusual questions from Jane, so that

he was not surprised by this one; but he could not answer it.

"I don't know how big it would be," he replied. "Probably some kingdoms are big and some little. Why do you need to know just now?"

"I used to think," Jane said, still bending over Brian, "I used to sit on the hill under the apple tree and think about the Princess Elise and how she 'sat on a stool made of looking glass and looked at a picture book that had cost half a kingdom.' I used to wonder whether all those miles of hills and clouds and big blue river were not about as big as half a kingdom, and whether they did not make a picture book for me as fine as hers. Do you think so, Anthony?"

"If you count in the sky, I am sure it was as big as several kingdoms," he assured her, "and quite as fine to look at, as anything any princess could ever see."

Jane straightened up to look at him, and Anthony saw that there were great round tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Oh, Anthony," she choked as she tried to speak. "Will we ever sit under the tree and watch the river again? Will we ever be together, you and Brian and Nora and I, ever again in all our lives, after Mr. Jarvis once finds us? Do you think he will come himself; do you think he would follow us even here, Anthony?"

"He never would take the trouble to come to look for us on Apple Creek Hill," Anthony comforted her. "We are surely safe from him for a little while. We won't bother ourselves about him, not until we see him.

Let 's think of something else — let 's think about the house we are going to build for Nora."

Never at any time could that cherished plan have seemed more fantastically impossible than at that hour when the two sat in the cabin, hidden away from all the world by the storm which raged outside. But impossibility mattered little to that pair, whose imaginations were long used to spreading broad wings and sailing away into the far blue distances of pure fancy. As they fell to telling each other of the dwelling that Nora was to have, the cottage grew to a mansion, and the mansion to a palace. The heart of the dream was always that trim, little white house, "where they were all to be happy together for ever and ever"; and to this their minds really clung, even though they allowed themselves the strangest and most extravagant additions to the original idea. They added terraced gardens, tennis courts, dovecotes, wings, balconies and towers. The house with a gold chimney resembled that building to which Jane had referred when she was wishing on the three crows, — that palace which was small enough to come out of a magician's pocket but which grew and grew until it would shelter a thousand people. Thus did their dream castle grow until, to carry out the unfettered fancies of its owners, the walls would have to be reared with jade and jasper, and its towers roofed with silver, crystal and gold.

CHAPTER XI

WIND AND SNOW

IT was Roger Jarvis who, later, gave Anthony an account of what had occurred after Jane was gone. He, himself, had not come in at once with Matthew Ballantine, but had walked back a portion of the way with Mr. Thrale and Newton, talking of what was to be done in the matter of further search.

"Newton had lost everything of that know-it-all swagger," Roger told Anthony later, "and it is my belief that he will never quite get it back again. He begged his father to tell him what he could do; and, whatever Mr. Thrale suggested, he went to it without a word."

Roger must have been gone longer than he had thought; for when he returned to the house, Jane had been missing for some time. Nora felt sure that she had gone out at about the same moment that Mr. Ballantine had come in. Somewhere, in the back of her mind, so she said later, she remembered hearing the rear door close, as she took Matthew Ballantine into the room where Mr. Jarvis was waiting.

No one would ever know what these two said to each other at that first meeting after years of estrangement. Nora had stopped for a moment to let Matthew Ballantine go in alone, and thus the remembrance of what words were exchanged lay only with themselves. By

the time Roger entered, Jonathan Jarvis was standing stiffly beside the fireplace, very ill at ease; while Matthew Ballantine, sitting in one of the uncomfortable chairs on the opposite side of the room, seemed to have said his say and to be content.

"What I cannot understand," Mr. Jarvis was saying, as Nora came in, "is what would have possessed any boy of ordinary intelligence to set out upon an aimless errand on such a day as this."

It was Nora who answered him.

"He went for help," she told him abruptly. "He felt that we needed a friend in this house, he and Jane and I."

Jonathan Jarvis seemed not to see the look of bitter reproach which she gave him; but it was not lost upon the others. The young woman had dropped, like a cloak, all her manner of respect and deference for Mr. Jarvis. In the face of such dire realities, they had ceased to be employer and employed; they were merely an obstinate, blundering man and a righteously indignant woman.

Mr. Jarvis looked across the room at his son, who was standing beside the door. One difficult meeting seemed to have been enough for him; he merely nodded coldly to Roger and vouchsafed no word of greeting.

"It was Nora who took the situation in hand," was what Roger reported afterward to Anthony. "She just told us what to do, and we did it. She was frantic when she found Jane was gone; but even that did not make her lose her head."

"What kind of children are these," Jonathan Jarvis had said harshly, "that fly out into the darkness at a moment's notice?"

Nora, standing in the middle of the room, holding to the back of a chair with tense hands, faced him directly as she replied.

"They are the kind of children who love each other, who belong to each other, and who will hold to each other, no matter what happens. There are a half dozen people loooking for Anthony; but they have not found him. Yet I am certain that Jane is with him; that, somehow, she has known where he would be, and has gone straight to him. You, Mr. Jarvis, with your plans and contrivings, have arranged to part the children for the rest of their lives, that a little money might be saved. And you have only succeeded in driving them both from this house. What will be the end, no one can tell; but at least we can be certain that they are together."

She did not wait for Jonathan Jarvis to answer or to defend himself against her accusations. She directed Roger, who had driven with Mr. Ballantine to the door, to take the car in which they had come, and to set out once more upon the Apple Creek Road.

"Do not stop even at Mark Lyman's," she said. "Go even farther — as far as an able boy could possibly have walked in this space of time. I think you will look more thoroughly than policemen can, or that trembling Newton Thrale. Do not miss anything on either side of the road." She had given Roger his

marching orders; and while he was buttoning up his coat, she proceeded to give directions to the other two.

"There is a chance," she said, "that Anthony might have found his way to the cabin on the hill. Will you go there, Mr. Ballantine, and see if it could be so?" Matthew Ballantine rose at once. "And," she added, "Mr. Jarvis will have to go with you. If Roger finds Anthony, he would be able to bring him home alone with the car; but if the boy is hurt and in the cabin, it will take both of you to carry him down the hill."

Neither of the two men made any protest. Roger gave his father his own heavy woolen scarf, since Mr. Jarvis was not so well prepared to face the weather as were the other two. Then Roger took them in the car as far as the turning that led toward the hill; there he set them down, and went off upon his own quest. Together these two ill-assorted companions plunged into the drifting snow of the pathway through the wood.

The light of Jane's roaring fire must have shone through the windows during fitful moments when the driving storm rested for a little. The feeble blaze which Anthony had been able to maintain would not have been any guide for them; but, as Jonathan Jarvis and Matthew Ballantine came out of the woodland path, they must have got a glimpse of that red beacon above them on the hill. There could have been no talk between them as they struggled up the slope. The storm was steadily increasing and, as they came out on the open hillside, it fell upon them with such fury that no words were possible. They came stumbling over

the doorstone, even as Jane had come; they fumbled at the door and, on the wings of a furious blast of wind and ice and stormy cold, they staggered into the cabin.

Mr. Jarvis entered first, and was greeted by an uncontrollable scream of terror from Jane. She grew braver when she saw Mr. Ballantine and ran to meet him with delight. Aided by Jane, he shook some of the snow from his coat as they came up to the fire. It was Matthew Ballantine who asked questions, who knelt down to examine Anthony's knee, who explored with gentle fingers the extent of Brian's injuries.

He very quickly drew forth an account of all that had happened, helping Anthony's halting tale by his ready understanding.

"Jerry Gibbs!" he said. "So it was he who brought you here! Well, I have been thinking that the fellow was an utter rascal; but there is something in him, after all. I hope he gets clean away. The man that he had damaged is almost as undesirable a citizen as himself. Jerry deserves the luck of escaping the constable."

Mr. Jarvis had said nothing, but had merely stood helplessly by the fire, stiff and embarrassed and quite useless.

"There is no use in the world," said Matthew Ballantine, "of our trying to carry the boy down the hill while the storm is as furious as it is now. We will have to wait a little; the worst of it will have spent itself before so very long."

He pulled up the bench from the corner and set it

opposite the fire. Jonathan Jarvis seated himself on one end of it and Matthew Ballantine upon the other. Not even the stress of the moment could force them to sit nearer together than necessity demanded. Jane climbed up to sit down as close to Mr. Ballantine and as far from Mr. Jarvis as was possible. Matthew Ballantine put his arm about her and she leaned against him, worn out and sleepy, now that she need not feel afraid. Mr. Jarvis was so evidently at a loss what to do or to say that he had ceased, for the moment at least, to inspire terror even in her shrinking heart.

Anthony sat regarding them with more and more astonished eyes. The night had been full of unbelievable incidents; this one seemed to be the most astounding of all. That Matthew Ballantine and Jonathan Jarvis should have come together, that they should be sitting there upon the same bench, seemed some fancy even more impossible than those in which he and Jane had just been indulging. He could hardly accept the fact that those two were real, and wondered that they did not vanish at any moment.

Yet there they remained. Matthew Ballantine was lounging easily with that lean length which never seemed awkward, and with his head leaning a little forward to look down at Jane. Mr. Jarvis was sitting bolt upright, plainly most uncomfortable upon the hard and narrow bench, nervous and restless, even though he strove for an appearance of calm. Anthony fell to wondering which would speak first, and if they did begin to converse, which one of the many difficult

memories that lay between them would be the subject of their talk. Or perhaps they would not speak at all; but merely sit there in stony quiet until the storm was past.

He might have known that direct and downright Matthew Ballantine would suffer no such proceeding, and that he would be the first to break the silence.

"Jonathan," he said at last, "just what is it that you are planning to do for Roger?"

Mr. Jarvis hesitated as though in doubt whether or not he would answer.

"I am planning to do nothing for him," he finally returned.

"You know quite well," went on Matthew Ballantine, "that the boy has only one hope, and one very great desire as to what he wishes to be. He wants to study to be an architect; and he has all the makings of a very good one. I am well enough off now to give him this education; or he can even earn it for himself, by spending a few more years in the effort. He will, without any doubt, be a brilliant and successful man. The question is, do you care to have share in the making of that success, or not?"

"I do not wish him to study a profession," Jonathan Jarvis retorted, drawn into the discussion in spite of himself. "Except for a very few, professional men are never apt to make money. I do not want my son to be at the beck and call of the more rich and prosperous."

"You are wrong, Jonathan," Matthew Ballantine answered promptly; "a man who chooses a profession

because he loves it, is happy in that choice always, while it is the men who are wrapped up in the making of money who are at the beck and call of their own riches. Have you had so happy a life that you wish Roger's to be just like it? Have you not made one or two very great mistakes? Will you not persist in making another?"

"I have been successful," burst out Mr. Jarvis, his cold reserve suddenly melted by warming indignation. "I have gathered far greater fortune than you have, Matthew Ballantine. Who are you to talk to me of making mistakes, when I have gone forward to success, while you have stayed here always, a poor man, held by the narrow opportunities of a country town? Look what I have to show for the years that have passed, and look what you have. And you talk about mistakes!"

His vehemence had startled the sleepy Jane, who sat up, blinking and alarmed. Matthew Ballantine smiled reassuringly down upon her and then answered slowly:

"You have wealth? Yes. Success? Yes. And what have I? I have your son."

There was a long stillness. Mr. Jarvis knitted his fingers together between his knees, and sat staring at the fire. He did not attempt to answer; he evidently had no intention of so doing. Matthew Ballantine seemed wise enough not to push any advantage too far. He, also, sat quiet and did not return to the argument for a long time.

Finally, however, when he had, perhaps, decided that Jonathan Jarvis had been given sufficient time for thought, he began again.

"You must not hold it against Nora that she spoke to you as she did. She was desperate. When a woman is frantic with concern over some one she loves, she will give you whatever truth is uppermost in her mind. That she was telling you the truth, it would be impossible to deny. She was right in thinking that Jane's instinct would find Anthony. She was right in telling you how great your error had been, when you believed that these children should be parted. They *can't* be."

"You seem to believe," said Mr. Jarvis very slowly, "that I have made mistakes in many things."

"I do," Matthew Ballantine avowed easily. "But I knew you well, at one time, Jonathan Jarvis, and I know what is in you. Any man may make a mistake. The worst blunder that he can commit is to refuse to see that he is wrong, to be unwilling to make amends before it is too late."

"And that first mistake of all," said Jonathan Jarvis. "Do you still claim that in leaving you, as I did, to go forward alone, that I was unjust, unfair and unwise, as you so plainly told me once?" Since he had been dragged into talk, he would attack the root of that difficulty which lay between them.

"In your heart," returned Mr. Ballantine, "you know something of what that wrong really was. You have tried to bury it under an unheeding memory, but you

have not succeeded. You know that there is much of that matter which Roger has not heard. He shall never hear it. Except as it concerns your son, that affair is closed forever. You and I are men of mounting years, Jonathan; and that incident is so far behind us that we need never speak of it again. The only matters which we must consider now are those which have to do with Roger, with Jane and Anthony. We must come to some decision as to what is best for them."

"We?" repeated Jonathan Jarvis.

"We," affirmed Matthew Ballantine, nodding. "You will require help, and I am ready to give it to you. Not to force it upon you, Jonathan, as you may be fearing, but to offer it when you have need, to offer it with all my heart. But you are the one who must think what is to be done."

There was a long silence. Matthew Ballantine sat as though waiting for an answer; but Mr. Jarvis merely stared into the fire and said no single word. Anthony wondered why he did not reply. Surely, to Matthew Ballantine's wisdom and generosity, he must feel some response.

Brian whined suddenly, perhaps with increase of pain, perhaps only from a bad dream. Mr. Ballantine got up, went over to look at him, and patted him gently. Under his hand the dog quieted again. Then he once more felt of Anthony's knee.

"Is it anything bad, do you think, Mr. Ballantine?" Anthony asked, trying to speak casually.

"No, so far as I can tell, it is not very bad," replied

Matthew Ballantine. "It may keep you laid by for a few weeks, perhaps even for a month or more. Knees are slow to mend. But there is no need for worry."

"With such a knee as this, no one would have me around, no one but Nora," said Anthony bitterly.

They could see Mr. Jarvis wince at the boy's words; but he did not even look at Anthony. Mr. Ballantine went back to his place upon the bench.

He said cheerfully and easily, "Well, Jonathan, have you yet decided what is best for you to do?"

Still they waited and still Jonathan Jarvis did not speak. His eyes were upon the blazing logs, yet it was plain that he did not see the orange-colored flames, being lost in some thoughts of his own, thoughts as swift and flickering as the fire itself. Across his face there passed one strange expression after another, reflecting the struggle which was going on within him, but impossible to read. Jane and Anthony watched him in wonder, for they had never seen him have any look other than his usual hard and steady calm. He got out his handkerchief and rubbed it between his hands, as though the palms were wet in spite of the draughty chilliness which occasionally spread through the cabin. Otherwise his tall figure remained immovable; although, in contrast, his misshapen shadow danced, as though in undignified mockery, upon the wall behind him.

The noisy wind blustered outside, shaking the door and rattling the window panes, died now and again to a murmur, and then roared loud and hoarsely again.

Yet the tumult without seemed only to make more intense the silence within, as those three, all looking fixedly at Jonathan Jarvis, waited for the moment when he must find words at last.

He left his seat and walked back and forth across the narrow floor, an awkward, stalking figure. Then, finally, he stood still and turned about as though to address Matthew Ballantine. His face twitched and worked, but still he said nothing.

Jane had slid from her place upon the bench and was sitting beside Anthony in the corner. During a specially loud moment of high-voiced wind, she spoke close to her brother's ear.

"I think," she said, "that he does n't know what to say."

She started and blushed hotly, for a sudden drop in the tempest had made her words audible across the room. Mr. Jarvis turned to look at her. For the first time in the course of their acquaintance, Jane and Anthony saw him smile.

"The girl is right," he said. "That is what is the matter; I do not know what to say."

He took one more turn up and down the cabin floor.

"I seem to know little about young people," he confessed. "Certainly I have been wrong about these two — and Roger. Yet you must give me a little time, Matthew, to admit my blunders, even to myself."

He came back and sat down once more. "And more time still," he added, "to learn what I can do — to make amends."

The last words were spoken very low; but Mr. Ballantine, Jane and Anthony all heard them clearly.

Matthew Ballantine arose in his turn.

"All the time you need, Jonathan," he said, "and all the good will and help in the world."

He walked to the window and stood looking out into the dark.

"The worst of the storm is past," he announced. "I have been thinking that you and I, even the two of us that Nora insisted upon, are a little too clumsy to carry home a boy with such a hurt knee. I am going back to fetch Doctor Morton and a stretcher. Then Anthony and Brian can be got down the hill with the least possible pain." He began forthwith to fasten his coat and to turn up his collar. "You will stay here, Jonathan, until I come back? And Jane, would you rather wait, or will you come with me now?"

"Oh, no, I will stay with Anthony," she replied with decision.

Her face showed plainly her mistrust of Mr. Jarvis as a protector or as agreeable company; yet she could not be persuaded to leave her brother. Mr. Ballantine, before he went out, came across the room to stop over the two once more.

"Get out your watch, Anthony, and keep account of the time while I am gone. It cannot be much more than half an hour."

Anthony pulled out the fat timepiece which Jerry Gibbs had restored to him for the second time. Its cheery tick filled the whole room.

Matthew Ballantine stooped a little further and spoke a little lower.

"Unless I am mistaken," he said, "you and Jane have gone far, this night, toward earning your house with a gold chimney."

He was gone, leaving the place strangely empty without him. Jane drew closer to the fire and to her brother, as though she felt chillier and not so safe, now that their good friend had left them. Neither of the two could refrain from staring at Mr. Jarvis, who sat so uncomfortably upon the bench and still looked into the fire. Once or twice he glanced over at them and seemed on the point of speaking. But it still appeared, as Jane had noted, that he did not know what to say.

Brian caused a diversion by suddenly reviving in the warmth and comfort of his place against Anthony's knee. He wagged his tail with reassuring thumps; he tried to get up, but fell back with a surprised yelp of pain. He was forced to content himself with bestowing delighted licks upon any hand or cheek — and Jane's cheek was very close to his — that came within his reach.

The fire had begun to burn down to coals, making it necessary for Jane to fetch more fuel from the storeroom. Mr. Jarvis did his inadequate best to help her; but he fed the flame with such an inexpert hand that he all but extinguished it. He was forced to ask advice from Anthony as to what was the matter, and how to fan the dying flicker into a blaze once more.

"It was Roger's idea that we should put away some

firewood, so that we could get it when the snow came," Jane told him, as she came and went with her arms full.

Mr. Jarvis muttered something as he leaned over the hearth, adding the dry branches, one by one.

Anthony, who was nearest, thought that what he said was, "Thank God for that," but was never quite certain whether he had heard aright.

Jane had gone to the window and had pressed her nose against the glass. "I don't see any one coming yet," she observed. "The snow has stopped, though it is still blowing hard. There is a break in the clouds, over there above the hill, and the moon is shining through."

The half hour that Mr. Ballantine had designated

extended itself into a whole one, ticked off by Anthony's watch, — a long, long hour which at last came to an end. After many vain expeditions to the window, Jane finally announced in excitement:

"I see them coming; they are through the wood; they are half-way up the hill. There are Mr. Ballantine and the doctor and oh — Roger is with them!" She flew to open the door and admit Matthew Ballantine and his two companions.

"What will Mr. Jarvis and Roger say to each other?" Anthony wondered at the moment that Jane was lifting the latch.

It chanced that it was Roger who entered first, while the two others stood upon the doorstep, stamping off the snow. Jonathan Jarvis had got to his feet, and was standing beside the hearth. There was a glow upon his face which did not come wholly from the ruddy firelight; for there was equal warmth and brightness in his voice as he spoke his son's name.

"Roger," he exclaimed, then hesitated, grown suddenly nervous and uncertain again.

But Roger seemed to read in that look and in the tone of that single word, all that he needed to know, as he crossed the room in two strides and shook hands with his father. Anthony saw them join hands in the warm clasp of friends who have not met for many months, who have been lost and suddenly found each other again. No words passed between them. All the admission of blunders and wrong-doing which Jonathan Jarvis might have made, all the whole-

hearted understanding which Roger might have expressed, were crowded into that single silent moment before Matthew Ballantine came in with the doctor behind him.

Anthony could not forbear shrinking a little from the doctor's first touch upon his knee; but a moment later he found himself lifted deftly and skilfully, with far less pain than he had thought possible. Doctor Morton was as gentle with Brian as with him, and took such careful note of the puppy's hurts as to win completely the heart of his master.

"I will carry the dog," said Roger. "The stretcher will only just take Anthony."

The doctor and Matthew Ballantine took up Anthony between them and carried him through the door, while Roger stopped to cover the blaze on the hearth. Then he lifted Brian in his arms and followed. Jane and Mr. Jarvis came out last and closed the door. They both slipped and stumbled on the doorstep, floundering in the deep snow. In some way that she never understood, Jane's mittened hand was, all at once, in that of Mr. Jarvis, whether as a help to him or to herself, she was not in the least certain. For one of her short size, the struggle through

the drifts was especially difficult. Yet, somehow, she and Mr. Jarvis convoyed each other down the hill.

"I believe he is as much afraid of me as I am of him!" was the thought that struck her so forcibly that she almost asked him if it were true. As at last they came through the wood and reached the cleared safety of the street, she realized that never again was she to be in terror of Mr. Jonathan Jarvis.

As for Anthony, the passage down the hill in the stretcher was such a novelty that the whole of it seemed quite unreal. One thing he remembered long after the recollection of the jolting pain has passed away. He was muffled in blankets to the eyes, yet he managed to look about him as he was brought out of the cabin. The snow had ceased to fall, so he noted, but the high wind which had cleared the sky of clouds was still roaring across the hill. He could see the old apple tree, dark against the moon, lashing and bending in the wild tempest, buffeted and wind-beaten, but unconquered still.

CHAPTER XII

THE HOUSE WITH A GOLD CHIMNEY

THERE is no music more pleasant to hear than the ringing of hammers, when it is your own house that is building. There is no time when the world looks quite so fair as when you look abroad upon it through the open rafters of your own dwelling. So, certainly, thought Anthony and Jane, as they sat upon a high beam, swung their feet over space and looked far across that green hillside and the great, quiet river which reflected the glorious blue of a May sky.

This was, further, the first day that Anthony had been able to walk, without crutches, so far as Apple Creek Hill, or to scramble up the ladder leading to the rafters. For the whole winter his knee had crippled him, so that only now, with spring at its high tide, did he begin to move about with ease once more.

Brian sat at the foot of the ladder which the two had climbed, staring wistfully up to them, and barking short impatient barks at intervals, to remind them that he was waiting and that the time seemed very long. Once Brian had been so rash as to climb up after Jane and Roger by the steep rungs to the second floor of the house. To go up had been easy; but to come down proved quite impossible, so that he had leaped and barked and yelped with anxiety until Roger had managed to carry him bodily down again. The dog was

wise enough to stop below; but he found it most difficult to have patience until his two comrades came down to him. He could not longer be called a puppy, for he was now a year old and well advanced in dignity and knowledge of the world. The kind doctor who had cared for Anthony's knee had also taken Brian for his patient and had succeeded in making him strong and whole again long before Anthony could do more than hobble across the room.

There were two people who never completely recovered from the effects of that stormy night when Anthony was hurt. They were Newton Thrale and Jonathan Jarvis. Newton, although he regained something of his pose of owning the world, was really an altered boy. He had suffered a desperate shock; and he was young enough for it to affect him deeply. Through those long hours of searching in the blinding storm for the boy whom he had injured, he leaned only upon his father's courage and comforting strength, since what little he had of his own was completely swept away. He learned more of his father in that one night than he had observed before in all of his sixteen years of self-satisfied existence. His attitude of being immeasurably superior to his father in wit and wisdom disappeared never to return.

When Anthony was sufficiently recovered, Newton would come every day to take him to school in his car. It was noted by every one that he drove more carefully, and that he had ceased to consider that the whole of the highway belonged exclusively to him. He came to

stand on terms of closer intimacy with Anthony than he had ever stood with any other boy, since his self-conceit had always been in the way of his making real friends. Anthony's direct simplicity and his complete forgetting of what harm Newton had done him, were immensely good for the bigger boy, who profited greatly by the first genuine friendship which had ever come his way.

Jonathan Jarvis, also, was never quite the same man after that night in the cabin, although, outwardly, he showed little change. He would always be stiff and unapproachable, and would always give the appearance of greater unfriendliness than he really felt. But never again would he be, to Jane and Anthony, that terror-inspiring person which they had once considered him. And he, since he no longer knew himself to be feared, seemed to feel on far more easy terms with them.

The morning after Anthony had been brought home to the gray house, Mr. Jarvis, Mr. Ballantine and Roger held a long conference in the little parlor. After they had been talking for nearly an hour, Roger came out to where Nora and Jane were washing the dishes.

"Jane," he said, "we need you."

"Is n't it Nora you need," she asked in surprise and a little anxiety, "or maybe both of us?"

"No," he insisted firmly, "just you."

She was astonished and somewhat nervous, but no longer fearful. She whisked off her small apron, smoothed her hair and walked in beside Roger, with great calm and dignity. Roger set a chair for her

beside the table and opposite Mr. Jarvis. She climbed into it and wished a little that her legs did not dangle so far from the floor. The knowledge that they did so lessened, somewhat, her sense of importance.

"We want to hear," Matthew Ballantine said, smiling reassurance upon her, "just what is this idea about building a house, of which you and Anthony have been talking."

"Does *he* want to know?" asked Jane bluntly, indicating Jonathan Jarvis.

"Yes," Mr. Ballantine insisted, "he wants to know all about it, gold chimney included."

She drew a long breath and began to tell them, faltering a little at first, but warming to her subject as was her wont. They wanted somewhere to live that would be home for all of them, a real home that no one could — could take away from them suddenly. When Jane and Anthony got big, the house was to be Nora's, to live in all her life so that she need not wonder where she would go when she grew old. Jane did not describe to them that glittering castle in Spain which had grown up in the dark cabin when she and Anthony had been fighting to keep their thoughts from terrifying things. She told only of the house they had planned the most often — little, sunshiny, "with plenty of hollyhocks growing outside", and with no dark corners or steep stairs within. And of course the place for it to be was near the apple tree on Apple Creek Hill. The gold chimney, she explained, was not a real necessity; it was simply the feature that would make the house a rare

and wonderful dwelling — in short, good enough for Nora.

She had aimed the whole of her discourse at Mr. Jarvis, and when she had finished, she sat staring at him fixedly, wondering whether or not he had understood how much they wanted that little house of which they had dreamed so long. The shrewd glance which he gave her showed that he had taken in the whole of her idea and was now weighing it in the balance of his practical mind.

Matthew Ballantine took up the argument. If the small household was to stay together, Winstead was an obviously desirable place, as to schools, surroundings, and inexpensive living. A town of just that sort was apt to have only houses enough for its usual inhabitants, with very few for casual newcomers.

"There's old Sam Ferguson's house — he 's away this winter for his rheumatism; you could have had that when Nora and the children came here; and it is still empty until midsummer. They could rent that place for a few months if Bill Watson wants to pull this one down. But if they are to stay here permanently, they ought, certainly, to have their own house. The children have enough money to live on in fair comfort, in a town like Winstead. Is n't that true, Jonathan?"

Yes, Mr. Jarvis admitted, it was true. Such hopes as he had once had, for making much money for them in the future and keeping them on short allowance in the present, he seemed willing to abandon. They

"We want to hear just what is this idea about building a house, of which you and Anthony have been talking."

could afford to own a house in Winstead, a very small house, but — but —

"Then it is settled," Matthew Ballantine cut decisively into his doubts and misgivings. "Roger, show your father the drawings you have made for the cottage that the children want. They have talked to Roger about every door and window, every inch and corner of the place."

Roger unrolled the papers and spread them before Mr. Jarvis, while Jane jumped down from her chair and ran around the table to look. There was the beloved dwelling just as she had hoped that it would look, set forth now in a more finished drawing than the sketch which she had seen in Mr. Ballantine's office. There were the low eaves, the wide windows, the little rose garden sloping to the sun, and the apple tree beyond.

"Did you draw this, Roger?" asked his father in some surprise.

"Mr. Ballantine gave me all the practical details, and — yes, I — I drew it," replied Roger.

"You can begin to see what the boy has in him," Matthew Ballantine said. "He was planning houses, by himself, long before he ever came to me; this one is really from a design which he had brought with him, and which we elaborated together. But we will talk about Roger and his affairs later. Now we will all go up and tell Anthony what has been decided."

Apparently all of Mr. Jarvis' "buts" had been

exhausted; for he arose with the rest to carry the news to Anthony.

Jane was four steps in advance of the others as they came up the long stairs; and she burst pell-mell into the room where Anthony was waiting, propped up in the great bed. He was beginning to feel somewhat forlorn and left out, since the others had sat so long below without paying any attention to him. His face was white from the pain that he had been suffering, and he looked smaller and younger than usual, as he sat up against the pillows.

"Oh, Anthony, we have it, we are to have it, our house with a gold chimney!" Jane's delighted announcement was scarcely coherent, and, so it seemed to Anthony, hardly to be believed. He looked to Matthew Ballantine for confirmation of this startling news.

"Yes," Mr. Ballantine nodded with emphasis. "Mr. Jarvis has not quite authorized the gold chimney yet, but he has agreed to all the rest. Have n't you, Jonathan?"

"I have," Mr. Jarvis said. "I think Matthew Ballantine and Roger have somewhat hurried me into the plan, but I am beginning to think, with them, that it is a matter which calls for haste. You may consider that the house is to be yours and Jane's."

"And Nora's," Anthony insisted quickly.

"Yes, and Nora's. And now fetch Nora, Jane, and we will tell her what has been arranged."

Jane went clattering headlong down two flights of stairs, for Nora had repaired to the basement to attend

Brian, who was established on straw and blankets in a corner of the laundry. She came hurrying up on Jane's summons, looking apprehensive and bewildered, since Jane had not told her the reason for her being so suddenly needed.

As she entered Anthony's room, Matthew Ballantine made a sign to Mr. Jarvis and Roger. The three of them went out together, Mr. Ballantine closing the door carefully behind them. On the same spot where she had first heard Anthony broach the fantastic plan, Nora was now to hear of its glorious fulfillment. But that small and devoted household was to have its great moment alone.

The three others returned to the little parlor, for there were still matters to be discussed concerning Roger and his future. The breach between father and son was now wholly healed; for, in the stress of that wild night of search and anxiety, so small a thing as a quarrel must shrink into nothingness and be swept away. The two were seating themselves side by side at the table, with Matthew Ballantine drawing up his chair opposite, when a sound came floating down the stair, a whoop of pure delight, the lusty shout of joy that could come only from the lungs of a healthy boy.

"There is nothing wrong with Anthony's spirits," smiled Mr. Jarvis.

"Nor with his heart," returned Matthew Ballantine.

Events and changes moved quickly from that moment; although to Anthony, imprisoned in the big bed, things seemed to drag through many weary weeks.

It was the next day that Roger came up to see him, Roger beaming one moment and downcast the next. He was going home, he told his friend, going home at once; but he was to stay only for a time. It had been arranged that he was to return to college, later, to complete his preliminary course and then to study for that profession upon which he had set his whole desire.

"But there is no very great use in my going back now," he explained to Anthony, "so I am going to wait and begin again in the autumn. For the rest of the winter, I am going to be with my father, helping him with whatever work he thinks I can do.

"Whatever will Mr. Ballantine do without you?" asked Anthony.

"When spring comes, I am to be with him again," said Roger. "His work is not very pressing now, but when the warm weather begins, he will need me, so he says. I want to learn as much about building, from him, as I possibly can. I will stay through the summer; I can go home to Dad for Sundays. And when at last I get to be an architect, I am to be in some sort of partnership with Mr. Ballantine. He says he has always wanted some one to do the designing part of his work, while he superintends the building. I say, inside myself, that it will be if I am good enough; for I will have to work a long time before I even know half as much as Matthew Ballantine."

"And so everything has turned out well. You will never have to think, again, about Abner Hood hammer-

ing down his stakes to keep up his courage," exclaimed Anthony.

"No, it seems as though nothing were ever going to be hard again; that I can face anything now. That old wrong seems, somehow, to be quite set right, all through the kindness of Matthew Ballantine."

Anthony shook his head.

"It was you too," he insisted.

Certainly it was not only the generosity of Mr. Ballantine that had put an end to that long-existing difference; it was Roger's own courage and honesty of purpose which had gone far in the "long toil which makes a wrong thing right." Anthony did not quite know how to tell his friend so, beyond the inadequate words which he repeated with conviction — "It was you too!"

The next day Roger was gone, to the great regret of everybody. Even John Wythe came to Mr. Ballantine's office and asked "when that young fellow was coming back."

"Seems like the job does n't go along right without him," he declared, an idea which was shared by the whole organization from Matthew Ballantine downward.

Two days later, Brian came limping and struggling up the stairs to look for his master. He was somewhat recovered and seemed absolutely certain that he could not live another hour without seeing Anthony. From that time onward, the two were seldom parted; for, even after Brian was completely whole again, and could chase rabbits with as much zest as ever

before, he greatly preferred to spend the most of his time very close to Anthony.

It was on a day during the following week, that Jane once more came running in, large-eyed and breathless with excitement:

"The cabin on Apple Creek Hill is ours," she announced, "and quite a piece of the hill itself, reaching all the way down to the river. And, oh, Anthony, the apple tree too!"

Soon after, Matthew Ballantine appeared to verify this delightful statement. He showed Anthony a mysterious-looking document very full of "whereas" and "hereinaftermentioned", and such words coined for the bewilderment of those unused to legal language. The boy did manage to make out that "To Jonathan Jarvis, trustee for Anthony Whipple and Jane Whipple, were conveyed lots in the city of Winstead, of the following designation." Apple Creek Pasture it seemed, lay within the official boundaries of the town. The list of figures that followed, so Matthew Ballantine told him, specified that it was that portion of the hill which lay nearest the river, which the heirs of Abner Hood had sold to Mr. Jarvis for them. They had bought the piece of ground whereon stood the cabin, and the dear, crooked apple tree, and with it all those small casual things which made up such riches: the battered robin's nest in the highest crotch, the quail who came to feed beneath the wide boughs, the hawk who swung, watchful in the sky above, the soft solemn owl who had sat in the branches, dark against the moon. When Abner

Hood and Joel Davidson had made their long fight against the odds of cold and hunger and Indian hostility, they had won a homestead from the wilderness, not only for their own purposes but so that people in some far generation could live there in peace and happiness. And now those people who were to live there and be happy so long after, were Jane, Nora and Anthony.

Amongst the papers pertaining to the sale of land was a bundle of documents labelled "Abstract of Title", which, so Mr. Ballantine showed Anthony, gave a record of all the people who had ever owned the land. Here were the names of those Hoods who had sold the ground to them; here it was put down that Abner Hood and Joel Davidson had got the tract from the Federal Government of the United States, and that the Government in turn, by purchase and treaty, had acquired it from the Sioux Nation of the North American Indians.

"Some day, when you and Jane are of age," said Matthew Ballantine, "your names will be added to this list, and you can give the place to Nora, as you have been planning. I am glad to think that some one will own the cabin who will take care of it and keep it from tumbling into ruins as those old places, when they are neglected, are always bound to do. I have seen that it was kept in repair ever since I knew anything about building; but I have wondered often who would care for it after me."

That afternoon Jane went with Mr. Ballantine to walk across Apple Creek Hill and "just see how it

looks, now that it is ours." They carried with them a sheaf of wheat to tie under the tree, that the quail might have something to eat. The long, cold winter with a heavy sleet storm within the last few days had been hard on the birds, and more than one cheery-voiced little quail had lately been carrying an empty inside under his dappled jacket.

"The apple tree was covered with ice," Jane reported on her return. "The sun was out and made the tree glitter like diamonds from head to foot. On the very highest twig a crow was sitting; perhaps he was one of the same ones I wished on, and has come back to see if the wish came true. I called to him that it had, and he flew away. The river was a great, shining sheet of ice; it looked like a ballroom floor, it was so level and so smooth. It was blue, not deep blue like the water in warm weather, but gray-blue like the blue sky reflected in a steel looking-glass."

Anthony wished that he might see it; but as yet he could only hobble to a chair near the bed and could not even walk across the room.

"Something has happened over beyond Apple Creek," Jane continued. "Jerry Gibbs' cabin is burned down. It must have been that night we were in the cabin; for I saw a red spot of fire, through the snow, as I came over the hill. Mr. Ballantine says some people believe that he burned it up himself. They saw his dog skulking around it in the dark, but when he slipped away to join Jerry, he was too quick for them to follow him."

The apple tree, with its gnarled stem and twisted branches, was a fairy picture.

It was possible that Jerry Gibbs had set fire to the place to destroy any evidence of evil-doing which he might be leaving behind. Anthony thought of this, thought also of that red-hot stovepipe just below the ceiling and believed otherwise.

"I think he just left his fire going, and the high wind did the rest," he said. "If he liked the place so well that he would never sell it, I don't believe he would burn the house down."

"The man that was hurt in the fight is getting well, so Mr. Ballantine says," Jane told him. "Perhaps some day Jerry will come back again, he and the big, ugly dog." She shuddered a little at the thought.

A few days later, she and Nora went up the hill to carry more grain and to see how their offering had been received. The ice had melted in one vividly sunny day; but soft snow had fallen since, and the whole of Apple Creek Hill was a sheet of flawless white. The apple tree, with its gnarled stem and twisted branches, was a fairy picture, since every black twig and slender bough, every branch and every curve of the trunk was outlined with a tracing of light snow.

"I wish we could have carried it home to you, Anthony, or that we could have carried you up to see it. The sky and the river were so gray behind it, and it was so black and white as we looked up at it, there on the hill."

In the snow about its feet were a thousand tiny tracks of little furry feet, and of delicately stepping claws

where beasts and birds had come to relieve their famished hunger. The fine, three-cornered footprints of quail were the most numerous; and one quail had dropped a feather, spotted and barred with brown, gray, white and rust color. This had been carefully cherished by Jane and brought home to Anthony.

Very soon thereafter, the day had arrived for moving into "Sam Ferguson's house", since the tall gray dwelling was now to be pulled down.

"I 'll sell you all the furniture that 's in it, exactly as the house stands, for just about nothing," Bill Watson had suggested to Nora. She had looked about her at the vast, heavy beds which had to be moved every day to make them up and to sweep beneath them, at the angular, uncomfortable chairs, at the smoky cookstove which had almost as evil a disposition as the furnace, and had declined the wholesale offer. Their first coming to Winstead had been something of an experiment; so that the furniture of the place which they had given up had been stored and left behind. The narrow, gray house had gone begging so long that it was rented, furnishings and all, for less than another house would cost, empty. All three of the household would be glad to see the last of those tall, solemn pieces of black walnut furniture which had frowned down upon them for these last difficult months.

"We will buy the big clock," Nora said, "and the pie-crust table, and the spindle bed that Jane sleeps in. Oh, yes, and the music box. Jane loves it so that I had forgotten it was not ours."

"I 'll sell you the others, but we 'll call the music box a gift," returned Bill Watson. "It was n't any good until Matthew Ballantine fixed it up; no one else could ever had set it going. I think the little lady will like it better as a present than as something that 's been bought; young folks do. And I 'd like to have you have one thing to remember about the old house that was pleasant."

"Whoever would put up such a place as this, or would want to live in it afterward?" Anthony asked, for a portion of this conversation had taken place just outside the door of his room.

"Old man Gibson built it fifty years ago, and thought it was the handsomest house in town. A real showy place it was, when it was new, though they say he and his wife quarreled over every stick and nail that went into it. He left it to his children and *they* quarreled, and would n't live together, so it 's been empty this long while until Mr. Jarvis came along. I kind of hated to rent him such a house for Nora Carmichael to live in; but business is business, you know."

"It looks like a house that has been quarreled in," commented Jane. That was its epitaph; for only three days later the wreckers had begun to tear it down.

In Sam Ferguson's house the quarters were so cramped that no one had any elbow room at all, especially Brian, who was in constant difficulties over the things which he knocked down, and against which he bumped. But there was now the glorious thought that "it would not be for long", and that, about the

same time as the return of Sam Ferguson with his rheumatism cured, there would be ready for occupancy that long-dreamed-of dwelling on Apple Creek Hill. Were there not faint signs of spring such as redbirds singing and pussy-willows beginning to show gray and furry? And with the real spring the house-building was to begin.

"Sam Ferguson's house" was only a few blocks from the old one, so that Mr. Thrale was still comparatively a near neighbor. Mr. Thrale had planned to bestow upon Anthony a gold watch which, in its magnificence, much resembled the one which Jane had described that evening in the cabin, as the sort that she would like to give to him. He had consulted Anthony as to the exact make of timepiece which he would like to have; and the boy in embarrassed confusion had declined the gift outright.

"There is no reason for your giving me a watch, just because Newton bumped into me. It was n't his fault, or mine; it just happened."

The whole idea seemed to make him so uncomfortable that Mr. Thrale was forced to give up the project.

"He said he wanted me to have a souvenir of that night," Anthony said afterward to Nora and Jane. "Certainly I don't want any souvenir of what I can never forget. I would rather not remember how Newton looked when he came in, at midnight, to see if I was really alive. He had been having a much worse time than I; and he looked it. It was Brian who kept me from being killed, by jumping in front of the car. If

any one should have a gold watch, it should be Brian. He would love to chew it! And why would n't Mr. Thrale know that I like my own watch better than any other in the world?"

In the end Mr. Thrale presented Brian with a silver-mounted collar, a soberly fine affair which the dog, at first, hated greatly, but of which, in time, he seemed to become very proud.

Another wish of which Jane and Anthony had talked came true in the unexpected and easy fashion that is sometimes the case with wishes. Anthony's knee had improved enough for him to be able to walk about on crutches, and, as has been said, to go to school with the help of Newton Thrale. Crutches as a means of getting about are an interesting novelty for about an hour, and are an irksome annoyance for all the time thereafter. Anthony was growing very weary of them and wondering if he would ever walk without them, when the doctor decreed that he must be taken to a near-by city, for some special X-ray pictures to be made.

"I want to be certain that the kneecap is mending properly," he explained.

Anthony was most unwilling. They would find something that would keep him on crutches longer than ever, he declared suspiciously. If it had not been for Matthew Ballantine, there would have been great difficulty in persuading him to carry out the doctor's wish.

"I am going with you," said Mr. Ballantine, "and

when we have attended to your affairs, Nora and Jane are coming up, and they and you and I are all going to do something we very much want to do."

He would not divulge what this mystery was, and kept Anthony busy guessing all through the journey and the weary day spent at the hospital. It was not until Jane and Nora arrived, not until they had all got into a cab and been whirled away to a vast building where crowds of people were pressing in, not until he was seated in the big theater with fluttering Jane beside him, not until the curtain rose upon a fairy scene of dazzling beauty, that he realized whom they had come to see. It was the singing lady.

The opera was "Hansel and Gretel", produced with all the glittering art known to the modern stage. It is true that fairy lore has almost disappeared in the hurry and hustle of ordinary life; but it is still present in the shining world of music, light and color, and may it live there long! Jane gave herself up completely to the spell of the lovely tale of enchantment, and refused to think, for the time being, that these were real human beings and not actual goblins and witches and fairies of fire and dew. Anthony was more interested in wondering how the scenes were managed, to what contrivance the flying imps and the seemingly impossible transformations owed their being. But the music presently swept him off his feet and he forgot all other magic save that of the singing lady's voice. For long he had guarded in his remembrance a fragment of her music, that snatch of a tune hummed in the great

station as she debated over what to do with Brian. Now to that single treasure was to be added a wealth of memory, of music grave and gay, music with laughter in it, with the sound of silver wings, and of the airy winds that blow through a green forest in the spring. He had forgotten everything in the world save what he was seeing and hearing, until the final curtain fell and he came to himself with a start.

And now it became known that Matthew Ballantine and the singing lady were friends, friends of long standing, even from the time of his vagabond year. She had been a young girl then, very poor and very determined to accomplish great things. She had been studying in Paris, where these fellow-Americans found each other, and used often to go together to hear just such music as this, sitting in the high heaven of the upper galleries and feeling themselves in a higher heaven still of thrilling enjoyment. Mr. Ballantine took them all behind the scenes, a privilege made possible by previous arrangement, to meet and talk again with the famous Katherine Laguna.

She was still being called out before the curtain by the enthusiastic audience; so that she came to them from the stage, radiant and flushed with excitement, with a thunderstorm of hand clapping sounding in the great theater behind her.

"That applause should be yours, Matthew," she said, as she took them into her dressing room, and the great wave of sound reluctantly died away.

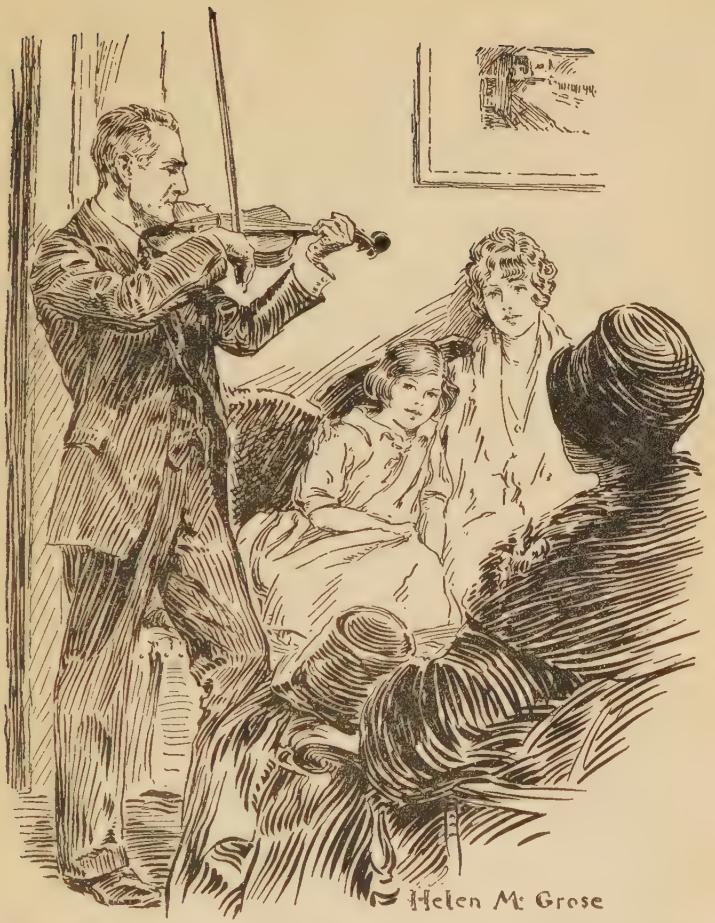
Matthew Ballantine smiled.

"That is strange talk to offer to a man who builds houses," was all he said, and proceeded to introduce his companions, "Whom," he explained, "you have met, informally, before this."

The singing lady inquired earnestly after the welfare of Brian and, on Anthony's asking bravely if she would like to have the dog back again now that he was older and more sedate in conduct, she assured him, with all her heart, that she was glad Brian had so happy a home and that she would not take him back for the world. She called one of the stage hands and had him take Anthony about amongst the devices for moving the scenery, so that he was introduced to all the mechanical mysteries of how fire, thunderstorms and magic changes are produced.

When he came back, he found that the singing lady had commandeered a violin from one of the members of the orchestra and that, somehow, she had persuaded Matthew Ballantine to play. Anthony sat down on a box beside the door and listened. More than one member of the company and of the orchestra, coming down the narrow passage, stopped to hearken outside the door; so that, before he was done, Matthew Ballantine had an intent small audience, of those who knew music at its best. Anthony saw the plump man who was leader of the orchestra walking away afterward and heard him mutter to himself, "That music! A builder of houses when he can make such music! Ach!"

The singing lady was saying much the same thing,



The singing lady had commandeered a violin and persuaded Matthew Ballantine to play.

as Matthew Ballantine laid down his bow. He put aside all her remonstrances with the same smile.

"The world needs music and it needs houses too, Kate," he said. "Whether a man does his best at one thing or at another, it is much the same in the end."

They all sat chatting for a time, and the children learned, in spite of Mr. Ballantine's attempted interruptions, of how much aid he had given this famous person, when she was at the small beginnings of her career. He had always managed to help her to hope when she was disheartened; he had stirred her courage when it was near to failing; he had found friends for her; he always had friends everywhere, among high and low. Anthony had a moment's vision of how Matthew Ballantine, poor and light-hearted, had traveled across the world, working at any honest task that would carry him forward, and scattering kindliness and generosity wherever he passed.

"I might have known it was like that," he thought.

The original errand, that of attending to Anthony's knee, fell into a place of small importance beside this exciting event. But the verdict of the specialist consulted was most satisfactory; and the boy was promised that he could, fairly soon, discard the wearisome crutches.

Spring came early that year, and came suddenly, as is its wont in that region near the Mississippi. For Anthony it was not announced according to proper usage by the song of a robin or a bluebird; but by the

voice of Mr. Thrale, early one morning, calling outside his window:

"Anthony, Anthony, we want you."

He sat up, rubbing his eyes, then tumbled out of bed and into his clothes. For some days the weather, though chilly, had held more sunshine than before; and now there had been warm rain in the night; and a dazzling sun had awakened every growing thing to life. The brown lawn had grown green since yesterday; and the fat buds on the trees were beginning to burst.

Newton was waiting with his car, looking a little sleepy, and with unbrushed hair all standing on end.

"Dad got me out to fetch you," he explained. "There is something he wants to show you and could n't wait. It is surely good to see anything make him so happy."

Mr. Thrale, when they reached his house, led Anthony hastily to the back of the garden. It was here that he had unenthusiastically "buried the tulip bulbs", and it was here that he began busily scraping the leaves away. Countless close-wrapped sheaves of green leaves were coming up through the dark earth, the broad leaves of tulips, the narrow thick ones of hyacinths, the slender fringe of crocuses and scillas. There were white snowdrops in bloom; there were buds of hyacinth showing color; here and there an early tulip had actually grown tall enough to send up a flower stalk, open its bud and smile with a saucy pink and white face upon the sunshiny world.

"We did that, Anthony," said Mr. Thrale in a tone of great excitement. "We planted them and here they are! I never thought they would come up. I — I never thought that I would feel this way about them when I saw them growing!"

The soul of a gardener was born in Mr. Thrale at this moment when he saw that first miracle of growth and bloom. Or perhaps it was merely the slumbering spirit of a gardener which had awakened in him, after being long ago lulled to sleep by the humdrum cares of business. Mr. Thrale in one breath made game of his own sudden enthusiasm; in the next, broke forth into new expressions of wonder and delight.

"Perhaps," suggested Anthony, "the reason that they have done so well is because, this time, you did n't think about any arithmetic when you were planting them."

"Arithmetic," scoffed Mr. Thrale. "I will never fill up my mind with figures again, when I have gardening to think about. Do you see that pink tulip, Anthony? Is n't it the finest one you ever saw?"

Anthony also was feeling the thrill that comes with seeing the work of one's hands blossom into the delicate beauties which man, alone, can never fashion. The earth and God's good rain and sunshine can do much unaided; when man works in partnership with them, then he finds himself blessed indeed. So the boy was thinking; so Mr. Thrale thought also; so perhaps, in some vague way, did the idea touch even Newton, but no one of the three could put his feeling into words.

"Do you see that space that Hopkins used to fill up with foliage plants?" Mr. Thrale went on. "I never liked them, but I used to let him put them there because I could n't think of anything else. I am going to have a vegetable garden there, with peas, beans, lettuce, asparagus — "

"Hold on, Dad," protested his son. "I 'm going to help you at this job, but don't let 's lay out a farm until we know more about it."

"I 'm not much good to help, now," said Anthony wistfully, but added the more cheerful thought, "Anyway, I could sit on the grass and dig dandelions; I can always reach plenty of those without moving. So we can all three work together."

"You will be having a garden of your own soon, Anthony," returned Mr. Thrale. "Did n't I hear Matthew Ballantine say he was going to begin your new house with the first day of spring?"

It was most gloriously true. Anthony had been wondering what it was, in the back of his sleepy, hastily awakened mind, which made this morning of warmth and sunshine stand for so much. That was it. With the first day of spring their house was to begin growing up from the hillside even as these tulips were growing in Mr. Thrale's garden. And there was Mr. Ballantine in his car, stopping at the gate and calling:

"Have you had your breakfast, Anthony? Do you want to go with me to Apple Creek Hill?"

Anthony swallowed his breakfast whole while Matthew Ballantine waited and while Jane choked over her por-

ridge, so great was her own excited haste. Nora must come also; Nora must see the actual beginning of the new house. It was not difficult for Anthony to walk along the path through the wood; but the steep trail up the side of the hill was another matter. But here, fortunately, was Nels Nelson waiting for them and grinning a broad smile of pure enjoyment.

"So," he said, "we begin your house to-day. That sounds goot — your house!"

Together he and Matthew Ballantine got Anthony up the hill, where the boy sat down upon a log with Jane and Nora and watched Nels and Mr. Ballantine taking measurements, squinting through a strange instrument, and putting in stakes. It was apparently not easy to lay out the site of a building where the land sloped so steeply from one bit of flat ground. It had all been carefully planned beforehand, however, so that in a very short time the measurements were verified and the last stake was set in place. The house was to stand facing the river, with one end toward the cabin. Abner Hood's house was to be most especially the property of Jane and Anthony, a workshop for him and a playhouse for her. He could store his tools and his baseball bats in the little room in one wing; she and Belinda could give endless afternoon teas in the other. The cabin and the new house would form two sides of a square, whose other two boundaries were presently to be enclosed with a green hedge. And in the center of the space stood the apple tree. Within the square would be bright flowers, a little garden for

vegetables and herbs, a round bench beneath the tree. The rose garden was to lie on the slope of the hill, away from the north wind and facing the sun. It was all so drawn upon Roger's plan.

"Spring surprised us, so Roger is n't here yet," said Mr. Ballantine. "He will come next week, I am sure."

"He vould never forgive us," chuckled Nelson, "if we drive one nail vit'out him."

Now the first sod was to be turned and Nora must do it, for this, in reality, was to be her house.

"Do it at this end, where the gold *schornstein* is to be," said Nels Nelson.

Nora turned the first sod, Jane the second, Anthony, steadied by Jane and Nora, turned the third. Nels Nelson then took the spade and fell to digging like a human steam shovel.

"I thought you were a foreman, Nels, and not a digger?" Nora remarked.

He stopped, wiped his forehead, and chuckled again, his deep Swedish chuckle.

"If Matthew Ballantine, that boy Roger and myself, we t'ree could build this house vit' our own hands, we vould so do," he declared. "There is not vun of us but feels jealous ven another fellow touches it."

It seemed an almost unbelievably short time before a road was made through the wood to lead slanting up the hill, before horses with scrapers were toiling at the digging of the foundation, before a busy confusion of men hammering, men mixing concrete, men calling to each other and giving orders to the striving horses had taken possession of the place. Once so peaceful and empty, Apple Creek Hill was now a Babel of voices and busy men. A new fence had been built across the slope, to cut off the domain of Charlemagne Augustus and his kind from the building site. Mark Lyman used to come thither occasionally to lean upon the top of one of the posts and watch the work going forward.

"Have you ever seen anything of Jerry Gibbs?" Mr. Ballantine asked him one day in Anthony's hearing.

"No, thank the goodness," returned Mark Lyman. "I think we 're rid of Jerry for all time, now. Least ways he 's never come back."

"Perhaps he 's dead," suggested Anthony solemnly. The farmer shook his head.

"If he was dead, the big, gray dog would have come home," he said. "I 've watched for him all winter, thinking one at least of them might turn up again. But they 're both safe and well, I 'm sure, and up to some rascality, somewhere. Let them stay there, say I."

Roger arrived only three days after the beginning of the building operations.

"I never saw any one so glad to get into his old over-

alls and to go to work, as was Roger," Matthew Ballantine said.

It did seem as though the building of the house held such zest for Roger that he could scarcely spare the time to eat or sleep.

With the making of the road, Anthony and Jane could come up early every morning in Mr. Ballantine's

car, to sit on the grass and watch the progress of the work. Later, Newton Thrale would come and take them to school. There were times when it seemed that

the house was to be a great deal too small, others when it promised to be a great deal too big; sometimes the work went forward by leaps and bounds, sometimes it seemed completely at a standstill. But in their hearts they always knew that the cottage was going to be just the right size and would exactly fit them in every way.

So it had come about that, on that afternoon in May, Anthony and Jane were sitting among the rafters, with Brian waiting so anxiously below. There had been cloudy weather for several days, with occasional showers and very little sunshine. The wild fruit trees on the hillside were past their first bloom, but still sent up to them soft waves of fragrance with every passing breeze. The hickory trees were clothed in long-fingered leaves that shone as though they had been varnished. Down in the valley of Apple Creek the sycamores showed their paler green against the dark hues of the poplar and hickory upon the hillside.

"When the hickory leaves are as long as a rabbit's ear, it is time to plant corn," Mark Lyman had told them.

"But when the hickory leaves are little, the rabbits are little too," Jane had objected.

She had come across one or two of the small brown babies, hopping about, unafraid beneath the apple tree. They were tiny enough to have sat easily upon the palm of her hand, and their delicate ears were not so long as her little finger. So she felt that Mark Lyman's maxim was not wholly sound.

The apple tree was almost ready to bloom. Every

twig held a bunch of tightly rolled buds, deep rose in color and as yet quite unopened. From where Jane and Anthony sat, they could look directly into its branches with their new leaves of palest green and their dull pink promise of abundant bloom. A bluebird of vivid color was fluttering from branch to branch, seeking very busily the wherewithal for his dinner.

The frames for the walls of the house were up, and a part of the roof had been covered in. The end where Jane and Anthony sat was, however, still open to the sky, so that they could see far and wide over hill and river and the valley of Apple Creek.

"I am not sure that I will want the roof and the walls to be finished," Jane said. "It is so glorious to look right through them and see the whole world."

"There will be plenty of windows," her brother reminded her.

Some of the partitions were going up, so that certain of the rooms were beginning to take shape. There were the long living room and the dining room which looked upon the river; there was the sunny kitchen with its wilderness of cupboards. There were the bedrooms, one for each of them and an extra one for guests. Matthew Ballantine and Roger must have spent many hours of toil and planning to realize so completely the ideal design, a small house with a great deal of room in it. There was even a little sitting room, "for Nora's very own", with wide windows looking to the sun and to the river. It was to possess a fireplace with a high chimneypiece which would reach to the

ceiling and which was to be built — of gilded bricks.

"We cannot very well have the gold chimney on the outside, because somebody might be tempted to go away with it," Mr. Ballantine had explained.

With the gay color scheme which Roger had planned for the little room, the dull mat gold of the fireplace would be in beautiful accord. That "Nora must have her gold chimney" was the firm determination of every one concerned.

Roger and Matthew Ballantine were standing near to Jane and Anthony, and had just put some finishing touches to the framing which supported the roof. Roger laid his hand affectionately upon one of the rafters.

"I wonder how long it will stand," he said. "A lifetime? More than that. What is a lifetime to a builder?"

"A man who puts up a house wants it to stand against wind and weather long after he is gone," returned Mr. Ballantine. "His name will be quite forgotten by the time some one, living generations after him, will be able to say whether that man built well or ill. Abner Hood's name was almost lost to men's memory; yet that cabin which he made without skill, was framed, as all men can see, by one who was bound that his work should be lasting."

Roger nodded understanding and walked away, seeming still to be pondering what Mr. Ballantine had said. He went down the ladder, stepped over Brian who would not move from the spot where he was

planted, and got into the waiting car. All the workmen had gone home; but he and Matthew Ballantine loved to stay after the departure of the others, to tinker a little here, to drive a nail there, to add such loving improvements as they could find to bestow upon the house in which they took so much pride and pleasure. This evening there was to be a picnic supper under the tree; and Roger had gone to fetch Nora and the big hamper.

"I think that boy will be something very great, some day," said Mr. Ballantine.

He had come to stand beside the beam where Anthony and Jane were sitting. He was looking after Roger with an expression of such satisfied happiness that Jane said earnestly:

"I think you are more pleased over the thought of Roger's being great, than if it had been yourself."

Matthew Ballantine smiled upon her across the intervening space.

"I have found," he declared slowly, "that what we miss in our youth, we do not miss forever. When we see some younger person carry out his great desire, we can sometimes feel as much happiness as though that desire had been our own."

Jane thought this over for a long minute.

"Mr. Ballantine," she burst out finally, "you are n't like other people. You — you remind me, somehow, of the prince who had a white swan's wing."

Matthew Ballantine looked bewildered and glanced at Anthony, as though hoping for an explanation.

Anthony only smiled; he remembered well "the talk of white swan's wings", about which their friend had inquired, that first day that he had come to them on Apple Creek Hill. Mr. Ballantine thrust his hand through the back of his bushy, gray hair as he often did when he was puzzled.

"I do not quite understand you, Mistress Jane," he said, "but I think I like the idea just the same."

The sun had come out as they first sat there talking, and had dropped a flood of golden warmth all round and about them.

"Look," said Anthony suddenly, "the apple tree is beginning to bloom."

The hot sunshine had indeed wrought its magic upon those tightly closed buds. Even as the three were watching, the flowers had begun to open; the deep rose changed slowly to shell-pink, then to masses and drifts of white, so that the gigantic bouquet of bloom beneath them was every shade, from dull scarlet-rose through fainter and fainter pink to the white of a summer cloud.

Jane scarcely breathed as the slow enchantment spread over the whole tree.

"Our apple tree," Anthony heard her whisper. "Our apple tree!"

A soft sweetness came floating in to them, mingled with the humming voice of bees. Mr. Ballantine stood in silence beside them. He could say nothing, just as they also could not speak aloud.

And now Nora, with Roger, was arriving below, and

Matthew Ballantine descended the ladder to help lift the basket from the car. Jane moved reluctantly upon the beam, for they too must go down. She looked across the green hillside, down upon the woods and the winding creek; she looked at the blooming apple tree and then turned her glance to the far prospect of river, bluffs and sailing clouds. Below them on the grass were those three friends who would stand by them through whatever life could bring; all about them was wide beauty of earth and sky, beauty which was to be there always, just for them.

"Is it as big as half a kingdom, do you think, Jane?" asked Anthony.

She nodded without replying. They both knew well that all the kingdoms of the earth could not measure, in that hour, the length and breadth of their happiness.

H·B·M·